

STORIES with a VENGEANCE

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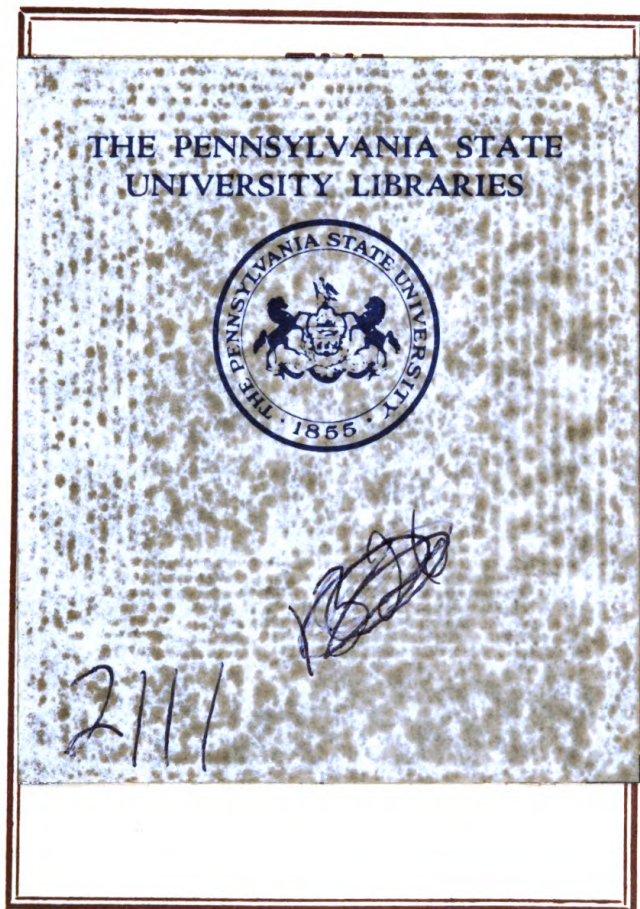
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STORIES
WITH A VENGEANCE.

BY



GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA

AND OTHERS.

NINE ILLUSTRATIONS.

LONDON:

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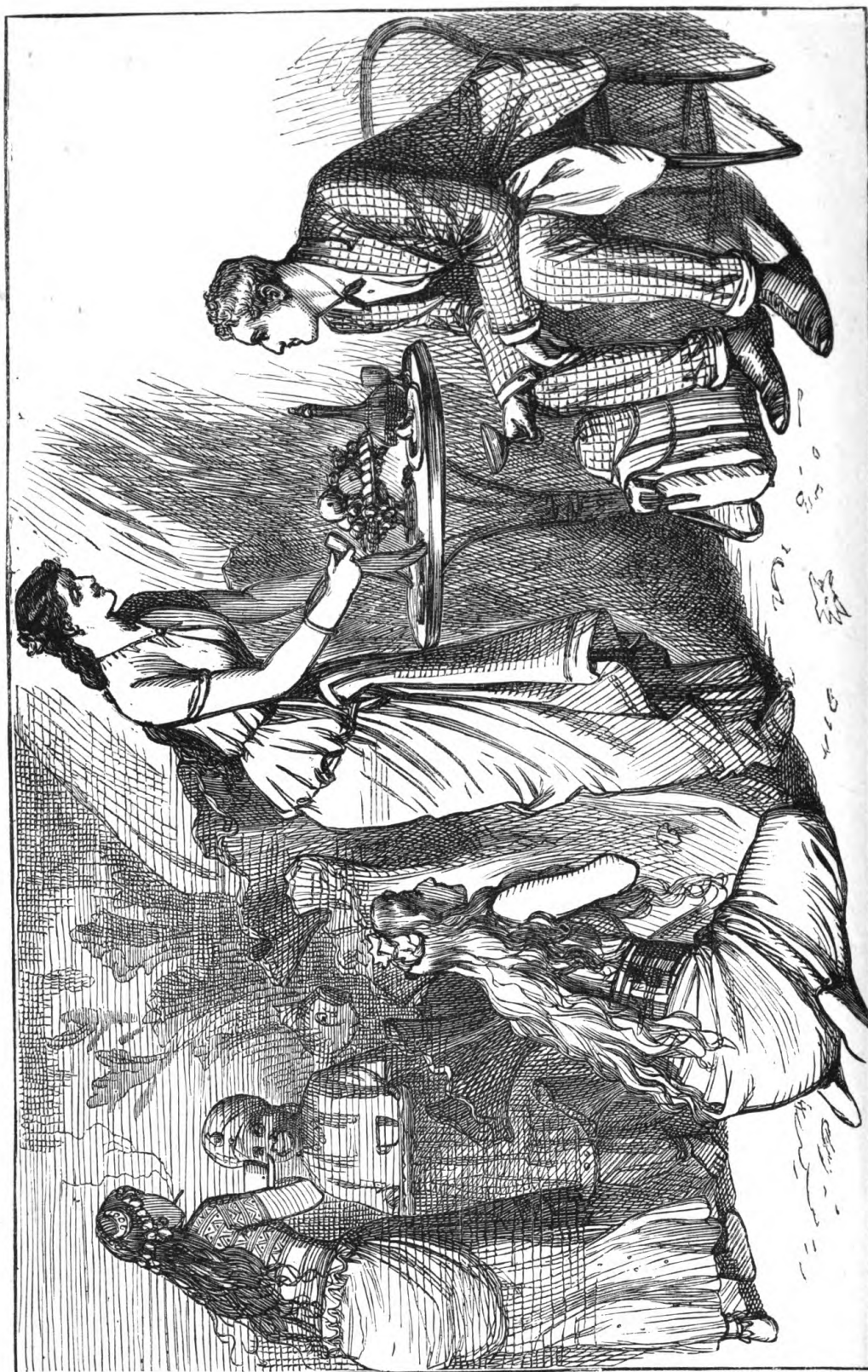
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"IT STRIKES ME, TOO, YOUNG SIR, THAT YOU YOURSELF ARE NO INVETERATE FOE TO THE WEED." (See p. 18.)

THE STORY OF JACK THE PAINTER, AND THE THREE UGLY OLD WOMEN.

A MORALITY WHICH SHOULD BE TRUE.

BY GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA.

I.

ALL of us, obviously, have our failings. We should not be human, indeed, if we were not fallible; and an intolerably wearisome, conceited, and stuck-up set of people we should be, I take it, if we were all, humanly speaking, Perfect. But perhaps you will say that tediousness, conceit, and arrogance are incompatible with real Perfection. You are entitled to your own opinion on that head, and I to mine. I am a professor of paradoxes.

I repeat that we all have our failings: some of us in a greater and some in a smaller degree; but in the majority of instances, I am happy to believe, the faults are, to some extent, at least, counter-balanced by good qualities. This man is an inveterate fibber; but he is extremely good-natured. That other has been stingy, extortionate, and rapacious till he reached the age of seventy: when it suddenly occurred to him to endow an orphan asylum with two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. And most people have some pet foible, some favourite failing, against which there may be the set-off of an equally conspicuous virtue. Of course I am excepting from the ordinary category of humanity armed burglars, wife-beaters, the monsters who starve children, and the money-lenders who cozen poor women into signing bills of sale and then seize their chattels. I do not regard such wretches as being human, in the proper sense of the term, at all.

Now, my friend Jack the Painter was, with one exception, an excellent fellow. He was brave, truthful, honest, industrious,

generous, and tender-hearted. But the exception was one that sadly militated against his success in life. His failing was this. Jack the Painter could never keep any money in his pocket. He was the most thriftless young fellow of five-and-twenty that ever cultivated the pictorial art for a livelihood in a studio (with a bedroom behind it) in Upper Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square. Yes, John Fuseli Halstead, commonly called by his friends and associates Jack the Painter, was an apparently incorrigible prodigal. He had no father nor mother to reproach him with his prodigality, it is true, for he had been left an orphan at a very early age, and had scarcely any kith or kin remaining in the world; but everybody knew and told him that he was a spendthrift. His friends told him so with an "I say, Jack," and a "Now, then, old man," of amicable remonstrance; the picture-dealers and, I am sorry to add, the pawnbrokers, who were his too frequent patrons, told him so with a shrug of pity; his creditors (he was always in debt) told him so in threatening accents; his landlady, Mrs. Copal, told him so with a sigh; her daughter Patty told him so with a tear. But all was of no use; and frugality and Jack the Painter seemed to be hopelessly divorced.

I will not go so far as to say (not having his nurse's sworn affidavit before me as I write) that he had been an extravagant baby, giving away his pap to all and sundry; but it is certain that he was a prodigal boy at school. His master, Doctor Brushmore, of Betula House, Turnham Green, told him so as grimly as he could, for the little lad was otherwise so lovable

that it was difficult to be very stern with him. Yet the reckless manner in which he lavished his pocket-money was positively awful to contemplate. It was his great misfortune to have a great deal too much pocket-money. His father had been a line engraver in the days when that branch of the chalcographic art was a very lucrative one; and at his death he left his only son Jack a sum of no less than five thousand pounds invested in the Three per Cents. His guardian, who was a partner in a great firm of copper-founders, applied the dividends accruing from the capital left by the defunct Mr. Halstead to the education and maintenance of Jack; and being besides a wealthy and liberal copper-founder, he "tipped" the boy liberally whenever he came to see him: and the disastrous consequence was that at the commencement of every "half" Jack, in addition to his weekly allowance, could usually show as many half-sovereigns as the great bulk of his school-fellows could show half-crowns. These financial differences were, however, as a rule, very swiftly adjusted; since, ere the "half" was a fortnight old, the boys with the half-crowns could usually show shillings, whereas spendthrift Jack could show no cash at all. Whether the money burned holes in his pockets, or whether the pockets themselves had been made from wire-sieves or fishermen's nets with very wide meshes, it would be immaterial to inquire. The fact remained that almost so soon as the money entered Jack's pocket it disappeared therefrom. In every school there is usually an incipient usurer. When he is a boy of twelve he lends on Saturday sixpence, for which he is to receive ninepence on the ensuing Wednesday. When he is forty he will lend money at a hundred and twenty per cent., or as much more as he can conveniently extort from his dupes. Jack was continually borrowing from the Trapbois of Betula House, a tall, gawky, sandy-haired lout, who kept his "lending-out money" in a tin cannister that had been used to keep fish-bait in. But he might have said of his pelf, with Vespasian, *Non olet*. As for Jack, he never lent money. When he had any he gave it away with both hands, so to speak. There were at Doctor Brushmore's the normal percentage of indigent or absolutely impecunious boys, whose parents were behindhand with their payments, or who were unable to allow their sons any pocket-money at all. There were gluttonous boys, and parsimonious boys, and boys who were toadies and parasites; and of these unfortunates and these bloodsuckers Jack was the lavish patron and the careless victim. Silver,

halfpence, apples, oranges, toffy, cakes, slate-pencils, tops, battledores, hoops, marbles, and balls of string he scattered around him in wild profusion. All the fruitwomen and all the beggars between Hammersmith Broadway and Chiswick Green were aware of him, and waited for him on half-holiday afternoons. He was in debt all round the neighbourhood for almond rock and ginger beer, for tarts and Scotch buns, for toys and illustrated periodicals, penknives, cricket-balls, kaleidoscopes, boxes of paints, and fireworks. Now and again the embarrassed state of his affairs would be discovered, and an explosion would take place. The Doctor would be indignant and talk of all kinds of high-handed measures. Master Jack was to be placed under stoppages till his outdoor creditors were satisfied; but Jack's guardian, on being written to, usually paid all demands in full with a five-pound note, and sent Jack a letter containing much good advice against wasteful extravagance and an invitation to spend the Christmas holidays at Tubalcain Hall, Hammershire.

The copperfounder was not quite so fond of Jack Halstead when the schoolboy developed into the young man and attained his majority. His guardian had three charmingly eligible daughters, not one of whom looked with positively unfavourable eyes on the handsome scapegrace, who was tall, ruddy, auburn-haired, blue-eyed, and generally well-favoured; and their papa, who really wished well to the lad, entertained an opinion that he could scarcely make a better start in life than by placing his five thousand pounds at five per cent. interest in the firm, and taking a post at a fair salary in the counting-house, with the prospect of becoming eventually a partner, and espousing one of the youthful and eligible young copperfoundresses. But Jack had other views. He had always had a turn for drawing. When, at sixteen years of age, he quitted Doctor Brushmore's hospitable roof—his preceptor, as he shook hands with him, mentally predicting that his departing pupil would never do any good for himself, but would, the rather, travel to the dogs at express speed—he entered himself as a pupil at Scauper's well-known academy in Newman Street; and really for a couple of years worked laboriously at drawing from the "round" and the "life." Indeed, idleness was not at any time one of Jack's failings, and he was endowed with that most disastrous faculty of being at once very dissipated and very industrious. He had made up his mind that painting should be his profession and historic *genre* his especial branch; and

he had anxiously awaited the time when he should be twenty-one, to enjoy his small fortune and fix himself for awhile in Paris, with a view both to improve himself in the practice of his art and to revel in all the pleasures of the gay capital. Nothing could dissuade him from his intent; so his guardian punctually paid him over the money to which he was entitled, and bade him rather a frigid farewell. "He's not a bad young fellow," grumbled the copper-founder, as Young Hopeful left his office the bearer of a cheque payable to order; "but I'm very much mistaken if before eighteen months are out he does not make his appearance in the Court of Bankruptcy."

The apprehensions of the shrewd man of business fortunately fell short of realization; still, it must be confessed that Jack did his very best to verify them. He made, to use the vulgar saying, "ducks and drakes" of his small but snug *peculium*. He was at least fifteen hundred pounds in debt to tailors, jewellers, and Jew money-lenders. He was more legitimately indebted for considerable amounts to his colourmen and his framemakers. As to prudently investing what remained to him when the harpies had been appeased and the legitimate creditors satisfied, the thought of taking such a step never occurred to him. There was so much money for him to spend, and he meant to spend it. So after royally entertaining successive batches of friends at Greenwich, Richmond, Hampton Court, Windsor, and Brighton, Jack Halstead betook himself to Paris, entered himself as a pupil in the *atelier* of M. Hyppolite Couscoussou, a *genre* painter of renown, and set to work with a will to improve his capacity and to waste his substance. In both enterprises he succeeded to admiration; and in a short space of time he became, for hard work and riotous living, one of the celebrities of the Quartier des Beaux Arts. All the young *rapins* swore by the handsome Englishman, and were only too glad to partake of the joyous breakfasts and dinners which he gave at the Moulin Rouge and the Restaurant Voltaire, to say nothing of picnics as joyous at Ecouen, Fontenay-aux-Roses, and Fontainebleau. Jack Halstead painted, etched, smoked, drank, played billiards, cards, and the *deuce* generally, to so very lively a tune that at the expiration of twelve months his instructor, M. Hyppolite Couscoussou, gently hinted to the handsome Englishman that he thought he had taught him by this time about as much as he was capable of acquiring, and that, on the whole, it might be as well if he set up a studio for himself, or, better still, retired

dans son pays—to his own country. The truth is that this very wild Jack Halstead had completely demoralized M. Couscoussou's studio and turned the heads of half the pupils upside down. Jack was not slow in following the advice tendered to him; at least, he took half M. Couscoussou's counsel. He did not return to England; but he hired a spacious studio in the Rue St. André des Arts, furnished it sumptuously with tapestry, armour, majolica ware, carved oak furniture, and other mediæval *bric-à-brac*, and set to work in right earnest to paint a picture of Richelieu dancing his famous saraband before Anne of Austria. He spent many hundreds of francs on costumes and models for this painting; but he was unable to finish it in time for the Exhibition of the Salon: and ultimately Richelieu dancing his saraband was sold to a dealer in the Rue Drouot for twelve hundred francs. The fact was that Jack wanted the money very badly. He had contrived in less than two years to muddle away the whole of his capital. Much of his money he had spent in sheer wasteful extravagance. Much more had been lent to fair-weather friends, in whose scheme of ethics the return of money borrowed was not comprised. One specious acquaintance had beguiled him into a Bourse speculation, the outcome of which was a loss of three thousand francs. Another had inveigled him into embarking ten thousand francs in working a patent for manufacturing indigo on new and improved principles, and which could be sold for half the price commanded by the ordinary indigo of commerce. The basis of the process was that genuine indigo was to be purchased and "chemically treated;" and the results of six months' experiments were that Jack's specious acquaintance ran away to California, leaving his partner the possessor of a Leyden battery and sundry vats full of sky-blue mud, commercially valueless, together with two quarters' rent of the factory to pay, and sundry acceptances to take up. The integrity of Jack was always beyond suspicion. He had two or three hundred pounds left out of his patrimonial five thousand; and after satisfying all claims upon him arising from that disastrous transaction in indigo, he sold up all the sumptuous rattletraps in his studio, and arrived in England with about a hundred and fifty pounds in his pocket.

The sum in question remained only a very short space of time in its resting-place. The artist, on his return, was greeted by troops of friends; but in the first instance the improvident painter committed an act of prudence—the first, he was

accustomed to say, laughingly, of which he had ever been guilty. His old chum Copal, the cattle painter, happened to die at a ripe age, leaving to his widow a tolerably long lease of the house which he had so long occupied in Upper Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square. Forthwith, Jack Halstead became the tenant, under a yearly agreement, of Copal's studio: taking, moreover, at a valuation, the easels, brushes, colours, lay figure, and other art gear of the defunct. He paid seventy pounds for the entire "plant," a sum very acceptable to Copal's worthy widow, who had been left with a charmingly pretty daughter of seventeen, Patty by name, in somewhat straightened circumstances. For the rest, Mrs. Copal succeeded in letting her house—a large old roomy one—very advantageously. She and her daughter occupied the parlours; Jack had the first floor; Niggleton, the miniature painter (he made a good deal of money in those days, but is working now for a wretched pittance for the photographers), lived on the second floor, and young Blockley, the draughtsman on wood (at present a distinguished member of the Institute of Painters in Water Colours), plied his useful vocation in the front attic and slept in the back one. It was a house of industry, and everybody in it made money (even pretty little Patty painted flowers on cardboard, which found ready purchasers at the fancy warehouses) except Jack the Painter. At least, what money he made was spent as soon as, and in many cases before, it was earned. He was acknowledged on all sides to be a clever and capable artist; but he was always in debt and always in difficulty, and he was the thrall of the picture dealers and the bond-servant of those pawnbrokers who advance small sums on the hurriedly executed works of art known as pot-boilers. Among those who had pecuniary claims upon him, two, however, had no cause to complain of him as a paymaster. Mr. Moss Maddix, of Rathbone place, Jack's chief patron among the picture dealers, took care that Mrs. Copal's account of rent and sundries should be punctually settled once a quarter, and his artists' colourmen's bills as punctually settled. "For," as Mr. Moss Maddix astutely reasoned, "hif the young feller ain't got no roof hover 'is 'ed, and no paints to paint vith, vy 'e'll go wanderin' about, somevhere, and paintin' for country dealers, vich would be a sad pity, for there's a deal o' meat hon him still. Honly five-and-twenty, not a feather to fly vith, and as hinnercent as a babby!"

As it chanced, Jack the Painter did go

"wandering about somewhere," and had he not so wandered, this story would never have been written. It chanced that Jack, coming home very late one night, slipped, as he was ascending the stairs to his studio, and sprained his ankle. It was a serious sprain; and the hurt confined him to the house for three whole months. He was able to work, however, with the sprained foot propped on a leg-rest; and work he did, at a table-easel, for week after week, quite furiously. Mr. Moss Maddix was in ecstasies, for Jack was producing good solid "stuff" in his very best manner. Mr. Trip-tolemus, the pawnbroker, was, on the other hand, not quite so pleased; for the invalid not being in continual want of ready money, the supply of "pot-boilers" fell off. Jack's own tastes, when he was left to himself, were simple enough. A pipe of mild bird's-eye, and a glass or so of bitter beer, sufficed for him; but when he had his fair-weather friends with him, he was by no means averse from treating them to shilling regalias and champagne. It is astonishing how fond we are of partaking of the luxurious entertainments provided for us by other people, and how prone we are to rebuke our hosts for their extravagance so soon as the regalias are smoked-out and the champagne glasses empty. So while Jack was laid up in the graving dock in Upper Charlotte Street his expenditure did not amount to a couple of pounds a-week. Worthy Mrs. Copal broiled his chop, fried his whiting, and made his beef-tea. Patty mended his socks, and read to him while he was painting; and the mother and daughter entered into a solemn league and covenant to keep the idle friends and the racketty friends, and the friends who borrowed money, away from the artist's door. The outcome of this surprising surcease of thriftlessness was, that at the end of a certain exceptionally golden month of August, when Jack Halstead, completely restored to health and strength, was enabled, with his usual elastic stride, to visit Mr. Moss Maddix, of Rathbone Place, and balance accounts with that gentleman, he found that the dealer owed him the round sum of fifty pounds. There was no getting over it. In all their transactions Mr. Maddix had never paid his *protégé* more than fifteen pounds at a time, and much more frequently the payment had not exceeded five pounds. There was always something "to the bad;" money had in advance, disbursements to Mrs. Copal for her rent, and to Messrs. Jollison, of Long Acre, for their paints and varnishes, their brushes and canvas. But in this case all possible deductions had been

made, all I O U's obliterated; and, as Mr. Maddix—who was a fair-dealing dealer, as dealers go—candidly reasoned with himself, “’E’s hearned the money, and I can’t keep the party hout of his hown.”

“You wouldn’t like to draw twenty and to leave thirty to the good, just as a nest-egg?” he suggested, as he prepared, with a very ill grace, to draw the necessary cheque.

“I shouldn’t like to do anything of the sort, my excellent Mo,”—Mr. Maddix’s familiars termed him “Mo”—replied Jack the Painter, with a laugh. “It’s a long time since I’ve had the fingering of a fifty-pound note; and into that particularly crisp and neatly-engraved document I intend to convert the cheque to which you are about to attach your esteemed signature.”

“You’ll have to change the note as soon as you get it,” grumbled the dealer.

“That necessity,” replied Jack, “will enhance, in a marked degree, the sweetness of the boon. I shall smash the fifty-pound note into fivers and the fivers into sovereigns; thus, counting your cheque, I shall enjoy the money five times over.”

“To say nothin’ of not havin’ a penny to bless yourself with in ten days’ time—hif the fifty lasts so long,” retorted Mr. Maddix, grimly. “Vell, I haven’t the dry-nussin’ of you, Mr. Halstead; and a fool and ’is money’s soon parted, they say, though you hain’t a fool—far from it, hexcept vere money’s concerned; and ’ere’s the cheque, and much good may it do yer.”

“Thanks, Mo,” said Jack, as he thrust the delightful document into his breast pocket; “I shall just have time to run down to the London and County Bank in Henrietta Street, Covent Garden. By by, Mo; I’m going for a jaunt into the country for a week or two.”

“Shtop a bit, Mister Halstead,” returned the dealer; “you’ll be back precious soon, anyhow, I s’pose, and you’ll be wantin’ an advance as usual on them little I O U’s of yours. You’ve been workin’ precious ’ard hever since you ’urt your foot; but takin’ one thing with another, I’ve not ’ad such a lot of stuff haff you.”

“You unconscionable old Shylock! If I had not sold you a lot of stuff, as you call it, you would not had fifty pounds to hand over to me to-day, and a lot of money to deduct into the bargain. And you know very well, you ancient marauder, that every fifty pounds you squeeze out, as though they were drops of blood, are counter-balanced by at least a hundred and fifty pounds paid into your banking account.”

“I don’t complain, Mr. Halstead—I never complain!” returned the dealer, with a resigned air. “You hartists is all werry ’ard on me; and yet I keeps you hall a goin’, Royal Hacademicians and hall. Taken all round, I’m a better friend to the fine harts even than Mister Hagnew.”

“I don’t say you are not, Mr. Maddix,” Jack the Painter made answer, looking at his watch. “But I really must be going. It’s a quarter to four, and I shall be too late for the bank if I’m not off.”

“Never mind the bank,” persisted Mr. Moss Maddix, “I’ll cash the cheque for you. I’ve got a fifty-pun’ note in the safe. But I must have one vord with yer. Vot are you goin’ to do vith that sweet little pictur’ that I saw yer a paintin’ last week? I mean the party ’ammerin’ haff a breastplate on a hanvil, with a Rembrandt light. It’s quite a bit of hillusionism. I wouldn’t mind givin’ you five-and-thirty pound down for it—there!”

“You mean my ‘Maso Fineguerra in his Workshop,’ most liberal of patrons. I don’t mean to sell the ‘Maso’ if I can help it. I intend to send it for exhibition at the Carlton Gallery. To-morrow, you know, is the last day for sending in. I’ve been at work at that little panel for fifteen months, off and on, and I’m rather proud of it. Con-valescence brought me, thank goodness, such clearness of vision and such steadiness of hand, that I feel confident that I’ve seldom done better work than there is in the ‘Maso.’ No, my Mo’. The ‘Maso’ shall go to the Carlton and run its chance. Perhaps a swell will take a fancy to it.”

“P’raps they won’t ’ang it,” Mr. Maddix observed, viciously. “And as for the swells, they hain’t got no money, in consekins of Hireland and hagricultural depression. Has for the manufacktorin’ parties and ’Merrikuns and Haustralians, they buy of the dealers ’cos they dursn’t trust to their own taste, vich they hain’t got none. Come, say the pictur’s mine, hexhibited or not hexhibited. I’ll spring the price to fifty, and pay ’arf on haccount this werry minit!”

“The ‘Maso’ must go to the Carlton, and run its chance,” Jack the Painter repeated, drily. “Please to hand me the money for the cheque, Mr. Maddix, and let me go. The framemaker’s van’s coming for the picture at five; and then I’ve got to pack up to start by an early train from Waterloo to-morrow.”

From his doorstep in Rathbone Place Mr. Moss Maddix watched the figure of Jack the Painter slowly lessening in bulk

as he sped into the wilds of Upper Charlotte Street.

"He's a rum 'un, that Jack the Painter!" mused the dealer. "He's got a fifty-pun' note in his pocket; and hif 'e's the Jack Halstead as he used to be, it won't be more than a fortnight before 'e's round at my place with a Hi Ho Hu for a fiver. But there's somethin' about 'im this arternoon I don't like. He wouldn't let me 'ave that little pictur' on no terms. It's real jam, that little pictur' his. I wouldn't mind springin' the price to a century. There! Shall I send my boy round to tell him so? But I don't like 'is looks: that's pos. Jack the Painter's never goin' to turn over a new leaf, is he?"

When Mr. John Fuseli Halstead, having changed his fifty-pound note into more convenient "fivers" at a wine merchant's in Tottenham Court Road, repaired to his residence in Upper Charlotte Street, and informed Mrs. Copal, first that he was in possession of the prodigious sum of ready money so frequently mentioned, and next that he intended to start forthwith for a fortnight's holiday "in the country," the dismay of that good soul was alarming and distressing to view. In vain did she conjure Jack the Painter, by her own regard for him and by the memory of his firm friendship for her husband, the cattle painter deceased, to lock up a portion of the money in his desk, if he would not confide it to her keeping. As for Patty, she turned very pale, and she trembled very much, but said nothing.

"I never wronged you of a halfpenny, nor you me," pleaded Mrs. Copal; "but do, now, like a dear, good soul, let me keep a few pounds for you. You know what happened the last time you went for a jaunt into the country; Mr. Maddix had to send his young man down to Gravesend, where you were in pawn at a beer-shop. Then another time, you went fishing, and you came back in an old smock-frock and fustian trousers, having sold your gentleman's clothes to a marine store dealer at Deptford. It will be the same this time, I know it will. You'll get robbed by the hop-pickers, or stripped by the gipsies, or murdered by the tramps. You're not fit to be trusted with more than a sovereign in your pocket, and that's a fact, Mr. Halstead."

Jack replied that what Mrs. Copal said might have been perfectly true in the days before he sprained his ankle, but that the accident in question had led him to think very seriously upon things in general; that he was determined to try whether he could not in the future exercise some command

over himself; that he had made up his mind to economise; and that, in short, he meant to turn over a new leaf. He intended, he added, when he came back, to consider very gravely whether the best thing for him to do would not be to marry, and settle down in the world for good and all. At this announcement it was noticeable that Patty turned paler, and trembled more violently than ever.

Finding it useless to wrestle with him any longer, Mrs. Copal let the wilful young man have his own way. The framemaker's van duly called for the picture of "Maso Fineguerra in his Workshop," and then Jack packed up his few needments in a valise, into which he also thrust a small knapsack, and went out to dine on a steak, and smoke a pipe afterwards, at a little club principally frequented by artists, held at a tavern in the Hampstead Road. The epoch had not yet dawned for painters to be members of Pall Mall or Hanover Square clubs, to build lordly mansions for themselves in the Early English or the Queen Anne style at St. John's Wood or South Kensington, and to entertain the Brahminical classes at their—the painters'—well-spread boards.

Jack came home very early, smoking a well-beloved briar-wood pipe of his, and bringing with him a copy of the last edition of the *Evening Standard*, in order that he might instruct himself as to the affairs of Europe previous to going to bed. He let himself in with his latch-key, kindled his chamber candle, mounted the stairs to the first-floor, and was turning the key in his chamber-door, when he heard a light footstep behind him on the stairs. He turned to see who was following him.

It was only Patty. The poor girl's face was as white as a sheet: all but her eyes, which were swollen and red with weeping.

"Mr. Halstead," she faltered out, "may I speak to you? I want to speak to you very badly indeed. I won't keep you two minutes; but do let me come in, please."

"Come in, Patty, by all means," said Jack the Painter, stepping on one side to let the girl pass into the studio. "What is it, my little maid? Old lady been cross? Had a few words with her? You've been crying, you silly little thing—or perhaps it's a love affair. That confounded pianoforte-tuner over the way proved false and fickle? Tell me all about it, and I'll run the phlandering villain through with my mahlstick."

There was, indeed, a pianoforte-tuner at a music warehouse over the way: a tall young man, with coarse red hair, knobs on his forehead, and one leg slightly shorter

than the other—who was the torment and the horror of Patty's life, first because he persecuted her with his attentions, which were of a strictly honourable nature, and simply abhorrent to their object; and next, because Mr. Pedalscrew, the pianoforte-tuner, being a strictly moral, abstemious, and frugal young man, was looked upon with some amount of favour by Mrs. Copal, who had hard work to make both ends meet, and opined that her daughter might do worse than contract a matrimonial alliance with a gentleman connected with the mechanical department of the musical profession.

At the mention of the hated one's name, two crimson spots came out on Patty's cheeks; but the blush was soon absorbed again in deathly pallor. She clenched her little hands, and with a violent effort said, "It isn't about Mr. Pedalscrew. I can't abear him. Why are you so cruel?"

"Well, little woman, tell me what it is. I'm all ears."

She did not like to be called "little woman"—in that tone, at least. It was a patronizing tone, a fraternal tone, an indifferent tone.

"Mr. Halstead," she continued, with painful slowness and indecision, "you have always been very kind to me. With the exception of mother, you're the only friend I have in the world. I am in trouble—in very great and awful trouble. I shall be utterly undone if I don't have ten pounds to-morrow morning. Mr. Halstead, will you lend me ten pounds? I have a good deal of flower-painting work to do; and I shall be able, in time, to repay you."

Jack the Painter, with much less alacrity than he usually displayed when a request for a loan was made to him—but perhaps he had already begun the turning over of that New Leaf—drew forth two five-pound notes from his purse, and placed them in Patty's quivering hand. She clutched at the money, almost convulsively.

"It's all right, little girl?" he said, interrogatively and, as it were, doubtingly. "No kicking over the traces. No making believe to hate the pianoforte-tuner and running away with him on the sly, eh?"

Again the two angry red spots came out on Patty's cheeks; but they abode there longer than their forerunners had done. Indeed, she blushed violently, and then, like a silly girl as she was, she burst into a great passion of weeping. Jack the Painter, who, without being exactly a mysogynist, was apt to look upon women as a kind of animated lay figures, to be paid so much an

hour to draw from, was concerned at Patty's distress; but he did not console her in the manner that heroes of romance generally console beauty in distress. He made no effort to kiss her tears away. Of course Patty would have been bound to box his ears if he had attempted to kiss her; but he didn't make the attempt, and she cried more copiously than ever; and the vehemence of her grief only led the good-natured artist to ask her soothingly whether the money she had accepted was sufficient for her wants, or whether she would like five or ten pounds more. He could well spare it, he said. The blunderer!

She dried her tears at last; and telling him that he had saved her from a great peril, bade him good night. But, halting on the threshold of the door, she turned, and said to him, in a hurried whisper, "You will not breathe a word of this to mother?"

"Not a syllable, if you say it's all right."

Patty nodded her head, and crept downstairs.

"It appears to me," quoth Jack the Painter, as, having donned his dressing-gown and slippers, he proceeded to light a final, or, well, perhaps a penultimate pipe, "that, on the face of it, instead of being all right, it is remarkably like being all wrong. However, she's always been such a good, simple, innocent girl that I can't bear to think of her running away with the pianoforte-tuner. I never heard of her having any other sweetheart. Perhaps she's bought a new silk dress on the sly, and the shopkeeper's dunning her for it. Girls do such odd things. And now let us see what the *Evening Standard* says about the Franco-German war." And he smoked his pipe and read his paper, and went to bed. The blunderer!

Meanwhile, Patty, the door of her room double locked, was on her knees before her little bed, her hands tightly clasped before her, and her tears falling like summer rain upon the coverlet.

"Oh, may Heaven forgive me," she sobbed, "the dreadful, wicked falsehood I have told. But I have got the money! I have got the money!"

II.

"THERE is something after all in the faculty of volition," said, with pardonable self-complacency to himself, our hero, as, just a fortnight after the events narrated in the foregoing pages, he stood at the door of a little village hostelry, called the

"Lamb and Tarbrush," situated—well, not to be too particular, not a hundred miles from the south-western verge of the Devil's Punchbowl, in Surrey, and surely not more than seventy-five miles from that lonely spot on the old coach-road to Portsmouth where there is a monument in memory of the cruel murder of a sailor, and of the gibbetting in chains of the murderers close to the scene of their crime.

Jack the Painter had enjoyed fourteen days' cessation from hard labour—I mean that kind of labour which we are compelled to perform in order that we may obtain that very troublesome thing called money; but he had not been by any means idle. Indeed, he had half filled a tolerably large sketch-book with pen and pencil drawings of rustic scenery and figures of quaint old cottages, and the still life of the farmyard and the village ford. He had had a glorious ramble in that "Heart of Surrey," which that admired painter, Mr. Vicat Cole, has delineated so beautifully; but somehow or another he had found himself continually wandering away from the itinerary which he had traced out for himself on the map, and finding himself in hamlets of which he had never heard before, and which he was unable to find on the map at all. For example, a week previously he had left his portmanteau at an inn at Guildford, and started on foot, with the knapsack, intending to trudge by Hind's Head and Haslemere to Petersfield, in Hampshire. He had taken things easily, in a pedestrian sense, and had been content to do his twelve to fourteen miles a day; but he had not reached Hind's Head yet. Unconsciously, he had diverged from the main road, and straggled over heaths and commons "unprofitably gay" with ferns and furze gorse, and then he would light upon a road which was not a main one; and then the road would bifurcate, and on one arm of the finger-post he would read such an inscription as the following:—"To Mouldymopps, Jugget, and Coshborough," and on the other, "To Cheesywugg, Pubbles, and East Jowling." If he asked a passing yokel where he, the traveller, was, the rustic would reply, "Four miles from where Jerry Abershaw wur 'ung;" and this information, although socially interesting, could scarcely be deemed instructive from a topographical point of view. He was somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Devil's Punchbowl, and the region of hill and dale through which he was rambling was very lovely. That is about as much as he knew about *la carte du pays*. It occurred to him on the fourth morning of his walking tour to ask a very dusty miller, riding by in a dustier cart, how far it was to the nearest

railway station. The miller replied that the nearest station on the "Lunnon and Portsmouth line" was at Queen's Corkleggatt, five miles off," civilly adding that he himself was going to East Jowling, which was half-way, and that he would be glad to give him a lift if he liked. Jack Halstead cheerfully availed himself of the offer; and while the cart jolted along, and the miller discoursed, half to his fellow-traveller and half to himself, about the hardness of the times and the war between "Boneyparte and the Prooshians," Jack pulled out his "A. B. C. Railway Guide," and looked for Queen's Corkleggatt; but there was no such station in the "A. B. C." "Perhaps it's in 'Bradshaw,'" murmured Jack to himself. "All kinds of rum things are in 'Bradshaw.'" Between ourselves, there had by this time begun to creep over Jack the Painter a vague conviction that not only were there "rum" things in "Bradshaw," but that he himself had strayed into—pardon the vulgarism—into a very "rum" part of the county of Surrey.

However, East Jowling turned out to be a very picturesque little hamlet, and the "Lamb and Tarbrush" was the cleanliest and most comfortable of villag inns. The first thing that Jack did, after dispatching a hearty lunch of cold beef, accompanied by a crusty loaf, some excellent cheese (only they liked it a little too "biting" at East Jowling), and a pint of country ale, with a "head" like that of a golden-haired "professional" beauty, was to ask if he could have a nice, quiet bedroom, adding that he intended to remain a few days in the village.

"Yer ca'anhev no bedrooms here," quoth Mrs. Cubbley ("Ann Cubbley, licensed to sell, &c., &c."), the landlady of the "Lamb and Tarbrush," "and I'll trouble yer to settle for what bin a heatin' and a-drinkin' hoff. Mr. Midge, the miller, thowt as 'ow yer warn't no good when he'd got close to yer, and was sorry he giv' yer a lift, and my man Jerry's a-waitin' houtside wi' a ca'art-whip to giv' yer a bastin' if yer tries to run away wi'out payin'. Ah, I know you fine-spoken townfolk, as 'ud heat and drink up a poor widder woman's wittles and beer, and then let her whistle for her rights."

"My good lady," replied Jack the Painter, much amused, "here's half a sovereign; take your bill out of it, and show me to a bedroom at once, if you have one."

"That's all very well," remarked Mrs. Cubbley, taking the coin. "It's one and a penny halfpenny, and I'll give you the change in a jiffy, and thank you kindly; but you ca'ant have a bed for all that."

You're a hartist; Mr. Midge, the miller, see yer a-drawing cows and pigs and wheel-barrows and things in a book, as you was bein' druv in his ca'art. We don't allow no hartists to put up at the 'Lamb and Tarbrush.'"

"Why, in the name of all that's ridiculous?"

"Becos they ain't got no money," made answer Mrs. Cubbley, folding her arms in a determined manner. "My aunt Hanner married a hartist as was a 'ouse painter, and could a' earned six-and-thirty shillin's a week, heasy. But rum, cold, in the mornin' was his ruin, and one fine mornin' wot does my gentleman do but run away to New York. I'd a' New Yorked him!—leavin' his wife and hinnercent hinfant babbies chargeable to the parish of St. Clement's Dane's, Lunnon. No hartists 'ere. That's what I tell hall the painter fellers. They swarm here like loaches in Horgust and September. Let 'em go to the 'Bag o' Nails' or to the grand new 'Railway Hotel' at Queen's Corkleggatt. We don't want 'em in these parts."

Jack the Painter hastened to assure the worthy landlady of the "Lamb and Tarbrush" that although he was a painter he had plenty of money—in proof of which assertion he produced a little canvas bag, containing thirty-five sovereigns. You see how very economical he had been since his leaving London. This offer only tended in the first instance to increase the landlady's mistrust of the stranger. She made no secret of her conviction that the gold was the proceeds of a recent highway robbery, and darkly referred to one Jerry Abershaw, a felon whose gibbeted body, in days gone by, had adorned the precincts of the "Devil's Punchbowl." At this embarrassing conjecture, however, Mrs. Cubbley's stout and comely niece Sarah arrived in a chaise-cart from Queen's Corkleggatt, where she had been to market. This good-looking and clear-sighted damsel very speedily put matters straight; roundly telling her aunt not to make a fool of herself, and proclaiming her own inward persuasion that the gentleman was a gentleman, every inch of him. The end of it was that Jack the Painter abode five whole days under the hospitable roof of the "Lamb and Tarbrush," and that he preserves to this day the pleasantest recollection of that sequestered hostelry; its lavender-scented sheets and flower-decked breakfast-table, its homely fare and cosy, saw-dusted parlour, where the village Hampdens, in corduroy and smock-frocks, met in the evening to discuss politics and small ale.

But it was time for Jack the Painter to return to London and to work. After paying his bill, he had still more than three-and-thirty pounds left, and it was that fact which compelled him to remark, with the "pardonable self-complacency" that I have recorded, that after all there was something in the faculty of volition. He had been "on the loose," so to speak, for a whole fortnight, with a pocket full of money, and, with the exception of a few largesses to passing beggars and tramps, he had not squandered a shilling. His present intent was to walk to Queen's Corkleggatt, take the train there, pick up his portmanteau at Guildford, and so rejoin his Lares and Penates in Upper Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square. Thus man proposes and Heaven disposes.

Bidding a cordial farewell to the now thoroughly reconciled Mrs. Cubbley and her buxom niece Sarah, who, dropping a profusion of curtsies, hoped that the gentleman would patronize the "Lamb and Tarbrush" if ever he came that way again, Jack Halstead shouldered his knapsack, and strode away out of the village, with a pack of white-headed little brats at his heels, cheering the kind-hearted "gemman from London," who had frequently bestowed upon them pennies for the purchase of sweetstuff. Stay; these gratuities may have been likewise somewhat of the nature of squandering; but, on the whole, I am inclined to think that Jack's unwarrantable outlay in the direction of brandy balls and elecampane had not exceeded one shilling and fourpence halfpenny.

The road from East Jowling to Queen's Corkleggatt was as plain as a pikestaff or as a directing signpost could make it; yet, somehow, that unlucky Jack, before he had been five-and-twenty minutes on his course, discovered, as one Dante Alighieri discovered several hundreds of years ago—

"Che la diritta via era smarrita."

By some inexplicable fate he lost his way, and found himself straggling haphazard among the ferns, and the furze, and the gorse. Nay; worse. Some mysterious law of gravitation attracted him towards a pine thicket, dark and lowering, and undergrown with underbrush; and in this "wandering wood" he must have passed a good half-hour, when the clump of trees suddenly and widely parted to his view, and he stepped on to what appeared to be a road, or rather track, stony, dusty, and uneven, stretching across a desolate heath. But there was a finger-post close by, and on the respective arms

Jack read, "To Old Bonesley" and "To Deadham."

Jack heard footsteps behind him, and turning, made the ocular acquaintance of one of the most hideous old women he had ever beheld. Her fearful old poll was—with the exception of a wisp or two of matted gray hair that hung over her forehead, almost into her eyes—quite bald. A dreadful gray moustache crowned her upper lip, and spiky hairs sprouted from her chin. A few foul tatters hung about her hunched body; and her splay feet and long, skinny, vein-knotted arms were bare. At her back she carried a dirty canvas bag, and she was munching what appeared to be a raw potato.

"The witch Sycorax, for a certainty," thought Jack; "her interesting offspring, Caliban, should not be far off. Perhaps Prospero and Miranda will turn up presently, or perhaps this is the Blasted Heath, and my elderly friend is the First Witch in Macbeth. I must have crossed the sea unawares, and reached an Enchanted Island. Good morning, old lady!" he continued, aloud, in his usual cheery tone.

"I ain't a lady, 'Evn 'elp me!" returned the hideous old crone, as she hobbled along, bending under the weight of the canvas bag.

"Good morning, mother, then."

"I'm no mother o' yourn, imperence," the hag retorted; "and goodness forbid that any Christian soul should call the likes o' me mother. I'm a miserable old 'ooman, that's only fit to live in a pigstye and die on a dunghill; that's what I am."

"Sorry to hear it," said Jack. "You ought to look on the sunny side of things. Don't you find that raw potato—excuse me if it's cooked—rather indigestible eating?"

"I'm a eatin' of it," replied the hag with the moustache, "because I ain't got no bread, and ain't had none these four days past. This here tater I stole outer Farmer Philbrick's field; and if you rounds on me I shall be took up, and Squire Grim, the magistrate, 'll give me a month in county gaol. I've bin there 'undreds of times."

"And what have you got in that bag? More potatoes?"

"No," replied the hirsute harridan, "they're not taters; they're pine-cones. I wos a pickin' 'em up when you cum by. The thicket is No Man's Land, although they du say that Squire Grim wants to inclose it, and rob the poor of their last chance of gettin' a little fuel for nothin'.

And, Lord love you," she continued, suddenly changing her tone from surliness to passionate entreaty, "Lord love you, young man, if you hev a 'art in your body, and ever knew a mother that loved you, gimme tuppence to buy a loaf of bread. I'm that 'ungry I can scarce stand on my legs."

Before she had done speaking the fingers of that reckless, imprudent, and incorrigible Jack Halstead were fumbling in his breast-pocket, and producing a coin he slipped it into the hands of the old woman.

"Why," she cried, eyeing the money with a look of blank amazement, "it's a sufferin! Do you mean to say this golden pound is for me?"

"Indeed I do, my good woman; and I hope you will make the best of it."

The hag with the moustache turned the sovereign over once, twice, and even thrice in her skinny palm, spat on the shining gold, "for luck," as the saying is, thrust it into some recondite part of her rags, and then, with a loud laugh of derision, uttered the following expression of gratitude, "*Well, then, the more fool you!*" with which she very coolly hobbled back into the thicket, and Jack saw her no more.

"Remarkable old lady, that," mused the painter, as he continued his route; "quite a woman of the world. Officers of the Mendicity Society probably know all about her. Will regale this evening on turkey and sausages at a tramps' lodging-house at Guildford; after supper, hot gin-punch and recitations to music of the 'Jolly Beggars.' Well, she only had me for a sovereign. Hallo! what have we here?"

He had become aware of a very strong smell of smoke, and presently he came in sight of a deplorable ruin of a cottage standing about five-and-twenty yards off the road which he was traversing. He made his way towards the ruin, which was still smoking, and found it surrounded by a small crowd of rustics, who hastened to inform him that the cottage belonged to the Widow Armlet; that she had been burnt out only the right before; that all her poor goods and chattels had perished in the flames; that she was seventy-five years of age, half blind, and half-paralysed, and that the relieving-officer of Old Bonesley parish had just sent a man with a cart in order to convey the destitute old woman to the workhouse.

Jack the Painter found the burnt-out widow sitting disconsolate on a half-incinerated wheelbarrow, wringing her hands and piteously ejaculating that she didn't want to go into "the 'ouse," and that if she went into "the 'ouse" it would kill her.

Gazing upon her, Jack found her at least two hundred and fifty per cent. uglier than the old lady with the moustache, to whom he had given a sovereign, and who had called him a fool for his pains. She had only one eye, and her upper lip was cleft, displaying two protruding yellow tusks, and giving her the aspect of a wild animal.

"Second Witch in 'Macbeth.' Wants a cauldron and a broomstick," thought Jack; but turning to the wretched old creature, he asked what he could do to assist her.

She could only reply that her "sticks" were uninsured, and that she was utterly destitute. She added that she had a sister many years younger than herself, and Nanny by name, who was in a small way of business as a shopkeeper in some village down in Devonshire, and that if she could only get to Nanny she was sure that she would help her. But she had no money; and Devonshire might as well be fifty thousand miles away.

Jack Halstead's first impulse was to give all the money that he had remaining to the burnt-out old woman; but on second thoughts he resolved to show the prudence which he had been disciplining himself into practising during the last fortnight. He looked around, and asked if some kind, charitable soul would mind harbouring the poor burnt-out body for a week or two, until he had time to write to her sister in Devonshire and receive an answer; and then, he continued, he would see what could be done towards getting a few "sticks" together for the old lady. "Meanwhile," concluded Jack, "here's thirty shillings down for the dame's board and lodging, and here's my card with my address in London."

The kind, charitable soul was soon found in the person of a burly butcher, whose blue frock and jovial countenance offered at once, to Jack's thinking, a guarantee of his respectability. This worthy man of meat promised to take the burnt-out widow home, and look after her. So Jack bade the crowd of sympathizing rustics good-bye, to which the hawbucks replied with a ringing cheer, and wishing his honour good luck. There was in particular among the throng a little negro boy, in a very white smock-frock and gaiters, who bawled "Golly, golly!" vociferously, pausing every now and then to laugh immoderately.

"Topsy's younger brother," thought Jack. "Bucolic incarnation of the 'Original Bones.' Never saw an Ethiop in a smock-frock before. Hi! come here, young Nubian Blacking!"

The small blackamoor came sidling up, his mouth grinning from ear to ear.

"Who's your governor, Ebony?" asked Jack.

"Massa Passon Clay," replied the boy.

"His father was King of All the Congoes," shouted someone in the crowd, "and used for to heat African missionaries. Parson Clay brought him 'ome when he was a hinfant, his daddy 'avin' been heaten by his heldest brother. He's a convart, he is, is Jumbo; and he's the wickedest little devil in the 'ole parish!"

"Sorry to hear it," remarked Jack. "Jumbo, you should mend your manners. It's never too late to mend. Be a good boy, and here's a shilling for you."

He placed the coin in Jumbo's sable paw, and patted the woolly head of the son of the King of All the Congoes. Then, raising his hat to the cheering rustics, he strode away.

"Five-and-twenty pounds," he was saying to himself as he trudged along, "will furnish a cottage very nicely for that poor old burnt-out woman. How ugly she was! By Jove, here's an uglier one! The Third Witch in 'Macbeth,' by all that's wonderful! The sky seems to be raining ugly old women!"

Right in the middle of his path there was crouching, bent almost double, a hag, who, had she stood upright, must have been very tall. Her face was as yellow as old parchment, and as wrinkled as one of Balthazar Denner's portraits, and her nose and chin nearly met. She was quite toothless, and was altogether a deplorable object. Her apparel, foul and ragged as it was, had at least one merit, that of extreme simplicity. She was draped from head to heel in what was apparently a patchwork counterpane, very much the worse for wear, and which was fastened at the throat by a skewer. When she saw Jack she hobbled on one side, and raised her right hand to her face, as though to ward off an impending blow. Jack could see that the arm was quite bare.

"Don't go fur to be chuckin' stones at me!" she cried, in a piteous tone. "I ain't done nothin'! I'm only poor old Crazy Kitty!"

"I assure you, madam," replied Jack the Painter, "that I have not the slightest intention of being guilty of the barbarous outrage which you so justly deprecate. But will you excuse me if I ask whether you do not find it—well, rather chilly in that remarkable upper garment of yours?"

"I ain't got no hunder one," moaned the ancient female. "This yere counterpin' is gownd, and petticut, and all. And I ain't got no shimmy. O! wirrimee, wirrimee! O!"

"Dear me! this is very shocking!" returned Jack. "But you mustn't take on so, my good lady. We must see whether we cannot rig you out with something neat and handy in the ready-made line. Why, where the dickens," he continued—"where the dickens is my purse?"

He searched and researched one pocket after another for his little canvas bag, but all in vain. With the exception of two half-crowns which remained in one of his trousers' pockets, all his money was gone!

"It must have been that villainous little nigger in the smock-frock!" he exclaimed. "The ungrateful young imp must have picked my pocket while I was tipping him with one hand and patting his confounded woolly pate with the other. If I can only catch him, I won't leave a whole bone in his skin!"

"Now, look you here, mother," the disconsolate Jack continued. "Some vagabond has just robbed me of my purse. I thought they had better manners in the rural districts, but I'm afraid they've been demoralized by the electric telegraph and the penny newspapers; and as things stand at present, I've only five shillings in the world, but that I'm quite ready to share with you."

"You're a dear, good 'ansome young man; bless yer 'art, and 'Evin 'll reward you!" mumbled the harridan in the counterpane. "But 'alf a bull's too much. Give us a silver sixpence. A tanner 'll buy me a meal o' wittles."

"Nonsense!" said Jack; "there is no spending in sixpence. The price of butchers' meat is so shamefully high. I must insist upon your taking half a crown. As for myself, I've got two-and-sixpence and my pipe and plenty of baccy, and all I've got to do is to walk to Guildford and telegraph to London for some money. Perhaps the Guildford police will put me on the scent of that atrocious young varmint from the Congoes, who lives with Parson Clay. Perhaps, my good lady, you wouldn't mind telling me how far I am from Guildford, and which is the way there. So far as I can make out, I seem to have been walking in a circle ever since I left the 'Lamb and Tarbrush' this morning."

For all reply, the hag in the counterpane extended her skinny right arm and clutched at the proffered coin. Then she drew herself up to her full height—she proved to be a very tall old lady indeed—she said,—

"The road to Guildford? I'll tell you, old bloke. *It's straight down the crooked road and right round the square.*" With which

enigmatical and, to all appearance, ironical utterance, she took to her heels, and ran away as though the Landlord of the "Punch-bowl," to which reference has been more than once made, were after her.

"How she scuds 'cross country!" mused Jack, watching the flying form of the hag in the counterpane. "Is she a humbug, I wonder? It appears to me that I've met a good many humbugs this morning. These sharp country folk are too much for us unsophisticated cockneys. Perhaps she only ran away because she was hungry. I'm getting as hungry as a hunter myself. I must have some lunch. I wonder how far it is to anywhere. I'm beginning to think that I've got lost in Wonderland. Well, at all events, we'll have a pipe over it."

Slowly walking along—he was on the verge of a steep declivity, thickly wooded—he produced his beloved briar-wood pipe and his tobacco-pouch. He carefully filled the pipe, and was placing it between his lips, when his foot coming in contact with a stone, he stumbled, and nearly fell. Rapidly recovering his footing, he found that he had dropped his pipe, and could see it rolling down the precipice of underwood, till its progress was arrested by a stone ledge about four feet down from the verge.

"Provoking!" muttered Jack. "Clearly I'm not in luck's way to-day. But I'll soon have Master Briar-wood in safe custody again. Steady's the word—steady. I'll hold on by the remarkable specimen of vegetation before me."

This was a dwarf oak on the very brink of the declivity, a weird and ghastly little tree, one branch of which protruded like the arm of a gibbet over the gulf. Jack caught hold of the branch, thinking to swing easily down to the stone ledge where he could see his briar-wood lying. But the treacherous branch snapped, as though it had been the merest twig, in twain, and Jack the Painter went rolling down the steep sides of the gorge.

"I'm in for it," he thought. "If this isn't the Devil's Punchbowl, it must be his tobacco-jar!"

Did you ever *dream* that you were falling, say, at the rate of several hundreds of feet every minute? Of course you have had such a dream. Well; Jack Halstead was wide awake. Of that circumstance there can be no reasonable doubt; for he pinched himself, tugged at his hair and beard, and rubbed his eyes several times, to make sure that he was not asleep. Yet the sensation of falling which he was undergoing precisely resembled that which we experience in a dream. He was not at all giddy, nor

in the least terrified. His head and limbs came in contact with innumerable objects; but none of them hurt him. Yet he was falling feet foremost and face upward, and he must have descended to a very considerable depth; since the amount of sky visible to him was reduced to a patch of blue no bigger than a man's hand, in which patch, although it could scarcely be later than two in the afternoon, he could plainly see the stars.

"If it were not," thought Jack, "for the slight uncertainty as to the precise spot where I am to have my brains dashed out, this continuous tumble would be rather a lark than otherwise. They say Truth lies at the bottom of a well. I wonder whether I shall find Truth at the bottom here, if it be a well and if it have a bottom? Perhaps I am falling right through the earth, and shall come out at Wagga-Wagga. Now, what, in the name of all that's phenomenal, is here?"

All at once he ceased to fall, and found himself sitting with his legs stretched out very widely indeed on what in the imperfect light appeared to be a bed of small shells.

"Is this an aquarium, or the bed of the ocean?" Jack asked himself. "Have I reached the Periwinkle Formation or sunk into the Whelk Strata? I'm sure I don't know; I was never strong in geology. I only know that I'm deuced hungry. Who's that laughing? Who's that crying 'Golly! golly!' I'm blessed if it isn't that confounded little imp of a nigger who picked my pocket. Where's my money, you young limb!"

As he spoke he started to his feet; for he saw glimmering in the semi-obscurity the face of a little negro boy, whose mouth was distended from ear to ear, and who was rolling his eyeballs in an alarmingly comic manner, the while he laughed consumedly, varying his cachinnations by spasmodic exclamations of "Golly!"

"I'll 'golly' you," cried the exasperated painter. "Give me back my money, you depraved scion of African royalty."

But the converted son of the defunct King of All the Congoes only laughed more shrilly, and rolled his eyeballs more provokingly. Fairly out of patience, Jack dashed forward to seize the impudent Ethiop; but the urchin, with a yell of derisive defiance, ran away. Jack gave chase, and followed the flying Jumbo through a number of dark and tortuous corridors. Suddenly it grew quite dark, and Jumbo disappeared altogether.

The darkness, however, did not last many moments. By slow degrees a succession of

veils appeared to be lifted from before Jack's eyes, and he found himself surrounded by a soft but brilliant light.

He found himself in a kind of rocky cave, ceiled by fantastic pendants of stalactite, and carpeted with seaweed and mosses of bright and variegated hues. On all sides were marine plants and beautifully-shaped and coloured shells, many of which were translucent, and seemed to serve as lamps. And, in the distance, there was a delicious murmur of falling waters.

"It is the bottom of the sea!" cried Jack.

"It is *not* the bottom of the sea!" responded some unseen person, in a clear, calm, silvery, but very decided voice.

"Well, then, ma'am, whomsoever I have the honour to address—it's the Grotto of Adelsberg."

"It is *not* the Grotto of Adelsberg! Quite the reverse!" answered another invisible respondent, whose voice was very low, and sweet, and gentle, but whose accent was one no less of firm decision.

"Try again," resumed, with a low bow, the unabashed artist. "Shall we say that it's the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky, or Cremorne Gardens, or a Transformation Scene in a Pantomime?"

"It is nothing whatever of the kind!" retorted a third voice, a very rich contralto, seemingly well exercised in tones of authority and command. "It is the Home of the Three Sisters; and Here They Are."

There had entered noiselessly—if they had entered at all—three youthful and beautiful ladies. The tallest and most matronly-looking of the trio wore a rich velvet robe confined at the waist by a golden zone. Her white fingers and neck sparkled with jewels. Her hair and eyes were very dark and lustrous. Her ruby lips were full and pouting; but on her upper lip there was the faintest indication possible of a dark and silky moustache. So classically modelled, however, were her features, that the slight hirsute addition at which I have hinted rather enhanced than detracted from her magnificent beauty.

"My name is Philocoma," graciously remarked the superb dame with the moustache. "My husband is up on that stupid earth, engaged on what he calls serious business. I merely mention this little fact in order that you may not try to flirt with me."

"Never flirted with any lady in my life," protested the painter; "especially with married women. I'd break the head of the scoundrel who dared to flirt with my wife, if I had one."

"Profession is one thing and practice is

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another," calmly replied the dark lady. "But we are wasting time. Let me introduce you to my Sister Nicotina. Nicotina, my dear, I present you to Mr. Impudence."

"You might as well say Mr. Wonderstruck. It's nearer the truth and it sounds nicer," expostulated Jack, as he made a deep reverence to a lady in sea-green satin, with chestnut hair and hazel eyes, who looked at Jack, over her shoulder, in a delightfully saucy manner, the while she placidly puffed at a cigarette.

"Nicotina is always smoking," observed the lady with the moustache. "We scold her for it; but she persists in the pernicious habit. It strikes me too, young sir, that you yourself are no inveterate foe to the weed, since you were fool enough to throw yourself down a precipice in the hope of recovering a rubbishing briar-wood pipe not worth sixpence."

"There, don't tease him. He's a poor benighted creature." Thus the Lady of the Cigarette, "We haven't introduced him to our sister Decamisada yet."

The Lady of the Cigarette and the Lady of the Moustache then led forward a third beauty—rather a "photographic" beauty Jack thought her—who made a somewhat liberal exhibition of a superb bust and arms. She was arrayed in some flowing drapery of a soft, silky texture, and of a very pale amber hue. The folds of her drapery were arranged with exquisite grace—she looked, indeed, as graceful as Ellen Terry in "The Cup," which is saying a great deal; but when she raised her arm, and the folds of her silken robe were momentarily disarranged, Jack looked in vain for any evidence of a garment of fine linen beneath. This perplexed him somewhat, and his perplexity did not escape the notice of the imperious Lady Philocoma.

"Now, Mr. Inquisitive," she said, sharply, "can't you keep your eyes off my sister Decamisada's dress? What have you to do with it if she does choose not to wear a—well, a tunic?"

"Yes," interposed Sister Nicotina, "and what do you mean by staring so rudely at my cigarette, and at my sister Philocoma's moustache? Haven't we all a right to wear what we like and to do what we like?"

"Of course you have, dear ladies," said Jack, humbly. "But I would venture to point out that it's my business to stare and to be inquisitive. I'm bound to be an admirer of beauty and a student of costume. I am one of those unhappy beings called painters."

"What do you paint?" asked Philocoma,

with no small scorn in her tone. "Signs, coaches, scenes, or black eyes?"

"Saving your presence," replied Jack, who was growing somewhat dejected under the persecution of his comely but implacable interlocutors, "I am an artist, and my especial line in art is historic *genre*."

"You'd better not tell that to the Rural Police," remarked Decamisada, severely.

"Nor to Mrs. Cubbley, of the 'Lamb and Tarbrush,' at East Jowling," added Nicotina.

"Nor to Squire Grim, the magistrate," pursued Philocoma; "he'd give you a month on the treadmill. I think artists come under the Vagrant Act, don't they, sisters?"

"Of course they do," acquiesced Nicotina.

"Yes; and so do the poets, and the novelists, and the musicians," continued Decamisada. "The artists, especially, become amenable to the criminal law when they are found tramping, under the most suspicious circumstances, up and down the country; riding in carts with millers, and consulting with beggar-women, gipsies, and reputed witches. I should strongly advise you to keep out of the way of Squire Grim."

Human patience has its limits, and this was a little too much even for the long-suffering Jack the Painter.

"Confound Squire Grim!" he cried out, with considerable heat. "What have I done that you should all be down on a fellow like this? I've been bamboozled this morning by three ugly old women that I tried to be kind to; I've lost my favourite briar-wood pipe, and I've had my pocket picked of over thirty pounds by a wretched little brat of a nigger, who, I have reason to believe, is concealed somewhere about these premises. How would you feel if I were to come here to-morrow with a policeman and a search warrant?"

"The policeman wouldn't be able to find us," calmly replied the Lady Philocoma. "There are no to-morrows here, nor yesterdays. To-day's performance will not be repeated. As for the black boy you mention, and whom you accuse of picking your pocket, I suppose that you refer to my Nubian slave, Jumbo."

As she spoke she struck a silver alarum, and forthwith there made his appearance, profuse in salaams and grins, the son of the King of All the Congoes. But he was no longer Jumbo, in a smock-frock and leggings. He was gorgeously dressed in Oriental garb, and his woolly pate was concealed by a white muslin turban, sparkling with jewels, and above which soared a bird of paradise plume.

"Jumbo," said the Lady Philocoma, "did you steal this gentleman's money?"

"Iss, Missy," replied the reputed *protégé* of Parson Clay.

"Who told you to steal it, sir?"

"You did, Missy."

"That's perfectly correct," the Lady Philocoma observed, quite coolly. "For once in a way the imp has spoken the truth. Well, Jumbo," she continued, "you must give the gentleman back his purse, and then you can bring lunch; it's half-past two in the morning."

Jack pricked up his ears when he heard the hour mentioned.

"You see," the Lady Decamisada explained, "that we always breakfast at ten at night. Usually we lunch at two a.m., but, in consequence of your stupidity, we're a little late to-day."

"And then, you know," the Lady Nicotina went on, "we dine at eight and sup at noon, shortly after which hour we usually retire to rest. We're quite simple people down here. Ah, here comes the lunch. Now you can leave off counting your sovereigns, and join us. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, counting your money in the presence of ladies!"

And Jack really was ashamed of himself, only he couldn't help it. For the life of him, he was unable to refrain from over and over again emptying into his left palm the little canvas bag which Jumbo had restored to him and counting the shining pieces one by one.

It was a capital cold lunch, comprising, as Jack was fond of remembering in after days, a *pâté de foie gras*, an *aspic* of quails, and a lobster salad. There was some admirable Pommery and Greno, *sec*, and some unapproachable "rain-water" madeira as a "whitewash," with coffee and *liqueurs* to follow; and Jack was permitted to smoke the famous briar-wood pipe; and the conversation grew very animated; and all was going as merry as a marriage-bell, when—

* * * * *

The railway-porter bawled out, "Guildford!"

"I beg your pardon," said Jack the Painter, as, suddenly waking from a sound sleep, he put his head out of the window of a second-class compartment of a train on the South-Western Railway, "did you say Guildford?"

"Of course I did," quoth the porter. "What else should I say? Guildford it is; and look alive, please sir, or you'll find yourself on the way to Waterloo."

Jack stepped from the carriage in a very

dazed and hazy condition. The porters and newsboys, and the clerk at Messrs. W. H. Smith and Sons' bookstall, could not help staring with some curiosity at the tall gentleman who for some two or three minutes after the train had started Londonwards continued to feel and pat his pocket, and examine himself from head to foot.

"Money right," he muttered to himself, "knapsack right, briar-wood pipe right. Everything right, in short, except John Fuseli Halstead, who, to the best of his knowledge and belief, is going straight off his chump." And he strode away from the platform.

"Ticket, please," cried the collector at the barrier.

Jack was immersed in puzzled cogitation; and mechanically he dipped his hand into his waistcoat pocket, handed his ticket to the collector, and walked onward. It was not until a good half-hour afterwards, when, having procured his valise, and returning from the station, was waiting on the platform for the up train to Waterloo, that it occurred to him to think what a fool he had been not to glance at his former ticket before handing it over.

"I wonder where I came from," he mused: "Queen's Corkleggett, Old Bonesby, or Davy Jones's Locker. The Locker, I think. It must be at the bottom of the Devil's Punchbowl, and inhabited by the Three Graces, or the Three Fates, one of whom has a moustache, another of whom smokes, while the third is, to all appearance, innocent of the possession of an innermost garment."

In due time Jack the Painter reached London, and hailing a hansom, was driven to Upper Charlotte Street, where he was received with open arms by Mrs. Copal and Patty; but when he triumphantly informed the mother and daughter that he had been throughout his jaunt thoroughly economical (for him), and that he had brought back more than forty pounds in gold, Patty, to his astonishment, instead of congratulating him, burst into a passion of tears.

"Oh, I am so sorry, so sorry!" she sobbed. "I thought you would squander your money as you always used to do, and that you would come back at the end of a week, penniless. And I told a fib, and deceived 'Ma, and borrowed ten pounds of you on the sly, that I might give you back your own money, and save you from borrowing from Mr. Maddix; and now you're come back as rich as a Jew, and I'll never, never forgive you. I mean myself."

It strikes me that Jack had learned something else besides thrift during his country trip. He absolutely put his arm round Patty's waist, and calling her a dear, silly, affectionate little thing, kissed away her tears. Nor, oddly enough, did Patty box his ears, nor the worthy woman, her mamma, reprehend him.

There were three letters waiting for Jack at Upper Charlotte Street: three letters in large envelopes, two of which bore the official seal of the Carlton Gallery, while the other was impressed with a monogram of an Earl's coronet and the initials E. B. interlaced. Jack, his heart palpitating with hope and fear, opened the Gallery letters first. In one he was secretarially informed that his picture, "Maso Fineguerra in his Workshop," had been accepted and hung. The second contained the even more agreeable intimation that the painting had been purchased for the sum of one hundred and fifty guineas by the Right Honourable the Earl of Bellarmine, G.C.B., Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

"By Jove!" cried the delighted Jack. "You're right after all, Patty, and I am as rich as a Jew."

But there was the third letter to be opened. It contained only a large card engraved in copper-plate, but with his own name written in manuscript: thus—

The Countess of Bellarmine

At Home,

Saturday, October 1st.

J. F. Halstead, Esq.

Whitehall Gardens.

10 o'clock.

A fortnight afterwards Jack, arrayed in a brand new dress suit, presented himself at the appointed hour at Lord Bellarmine's mansion. He was most courteously received by his lordship, who told him that he was so delighted with the picture of "Maso" that he had taken the earliest opportunity of making the artist's acquaintance. And, added the good-natured nobleman, he hoped ere long to become the fortunate possessor of other productions of Mr. Halstead's skilled and facile pencil.

Jack was presented to the Countess of Bellarmine, a strikingly beautiful lady in ruby velvet. She had very dark hair and eyes, and on her upper lip there was the faintest indication of a silky moustache.

"You mus'n't stare so," somebody whispered in Jack's ear, "it's very rude; and if you don't behave yourself I shall tell Squire Grim, and he'll give you a month."

"Mr. Halstead," interposed the Countess of Bellarmine, "I wish to present you to my sister, Lady Florence Perceforest. Florence, this is Mr. Halstead, the distinguished artist."

Lady Florence Perceforest curtsied very demurely to Jack, who, admiring her superb bust and arms, could not help noticing the apparent absence of anything resembling a "tunic" or under garment. He mentioned the circumstance that night, on his return, to Patty.

"You stupid thing!" said Mrs. Copal's daughter, with a laugh and a blush. "What right have you to pry into the secrets of ladies' dress? *They slip their arms out of the sleeves, and draw the thing down so that you can't see it.*"

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Jack, much edified. "One sees all sorts of odd things in the fashionable world. Would you believe it, Lady Florence Perceforest took me into the conservatory and introduced me to her sister, Lady Gwendoline, and we smoked a cigarette together."

"Ah, yes! I daresay!" quoth poor little Patty, pouting and half ready to cry. "And now you'll be a grand gentleman, and you'll forget all about your poor friends in Upper Charlotte Street."

But Jack the Painter had not the slightest intention of deserting his friends or Upper Charlotte Street either, until he had become rich enough to build a house for himself. Through the patronage of Lord Bellarmine, Mr. John Fuseli Halstead speedily obtained a number of remunerative commissions. He is now an Associate of the Royal Academy; and by his happy union with Patty Copal he has five charming children.

"That's an odd name, Jack, to have given to your eldest girl," one of his oldest friends chanced to say to him one day. "Philocoma! It sounds like an advertisement of a hair-wash."

"It was chosen by Lady Bellarmine," answered Jack, "who was kind enough to stand godmother to the young one. Her ladyship said that Philocoma had been the name of a very dear deceased friend of hers, somewhere down in Surrey."

"Ah," quoth the friend, "I've heard of Lady Bellarmine. Handsome woman, with a moustache. But Philocoma's a very queer name, for all that."

* * * * *

And this, perhaps, is a very Queer Story. If it has any moral at all I think that such moral may be briefly stated. You should do your best not to squander your money, especially when you have laboured hard to earn it; and if you are by nature extravagant, the best thing that you can do

is to marry a sensible woman, who will take care of your money for you, and not allow you to waste it. But you should never steel your heart against the pleadings of poverty; and in particular you should do your best to be kind and merciful and courteous to Ugly Old Women, even if they do occasionally *appear* to be impostors and call you a fool for your pains. I say appear to be. For aught you can tell, beneath the skinny and osseous envelope of the most hideous old hag that ever hobbled there may be a very beautiful Soul.

AT THE TUNNEL'S MOUTH.

BY RICHARD DOWLING.

CHAPTER I.

THE RIVALS.

THE river Wander flows through the middle of a gentle valley which bears its own name. All round the valley are soft, green, gentle hills, which, although largely covered with grass, are not too steep for tillage.

The valley Wander is one of the most quiet and secluded in all England. It is wholly devoted to pasture, and across its length and breadth there is nothing worthy of the name of village, although it has a radius of about three miles. The few farmhouses of the men who rent the land are thinly scattered here and there, and within a short distance of each farmhouse stand the cottages of the labourers who tend the cattle and serve the farmer.

The most striking feature in the whole scene is the Great Bannermouth Canal, which crosses the plain at right angles from east to west, across a huge embankment, one of the engineering wonders of the day. When the canal reaches the hills, at the east and west extremities of the vale, it emerges into the open beyond by means of two tunnels. Midway across the vale, and flowing, loosely speaking, from north to south, runs the river Wander, a deep, placid stream, which flows slowly all the year round, and is not much affected by winter rains or summer drought.

Before the canal pierces either hill, by means of the tunnel, it takes one step upwards at what may be called, speaking with relation to the Wander valley, the first lock. The water, flowing into the lower level of the canal, in locking boats up or down, escapes at an overflow sluice into the Wander river at the point where the latter passes under two arches beneath the canal. At the eastern extremity of the

Bannermouth Canal, and just as it emerged from darkness, stood a small mill, which derived its waters from a hill stream having its source at some distance to the north-east.

Almost opposite the house stood the lock-man's cottage, which was the handsomest and largest on the Bannermouth Canal. Here lived Gregory Menton, the lock-man, who, although he was paid for and discharged the duties of an ordinary man of the class, was far above his position in intelligence and education, and considerably better off than most of his fellows. He had his cottage rent-free, his weekly wages, more than an acre of market-garden, and a small pension which he received from a firm of Bristol merchants in consideration of a hurt received by him in their employment, which rendered him lame of his left leg for life.

Gregory Menton was a man of medium height, slender build, red hair, clear complexion, bright blue, fearless eyes, and fifty years of age. He was a man of singular integrity and straightforwardness, and his old employers at Bristol were exceedingly sorry to lose his services; but his accident wholly unfitted him for the hard physical work of their place, and they interested themselves for him until they got him made lockman at East Wander, a position which he told them would suit him better than any other he knew of.

Hither he had come, a widower, ten years ago, with his little daughter, Mary, then eight years of age.

Now Mary was eighteen, tall, lithe, oval-faced, fair, with light brown eyes, and a face always ready to break into a smile of singular gentleness and contentment. In a large town, no doubt, she would not have been considered a beauty, but in that

remote and sparsely-peopled region men looked on her not so much as a beauty as a homely divinity.

At the mouth of the tunnel there were only the two houses—Ryland's mill-house and the cottage. The mill-house adjoined the mill, and the cottage stood at the northern side of the canal, opposite the mill.

There were only three men altogether employed at the mill. Mr. Ryland, the miller, a burly, round-faced man of sixty; his son, Will, a loosely-made, good-humoured, fresh-coloured, sincere young man of four-and-twenty, and Pell, the miller's man. Mrs. Ryland looked after the house and the fowl, while her husband and son, assisted by Pell, attended to the tiny mill, with its tiny overshot wheel.

The Rylands were not by any means rich for people in their station, but they were comfortable and wholesome in mind and body, and greatly respected by all the parish.

It had been an open secret for some time that Mary Menton and Will Ryland were lovers; indeed, under the circumstances of their position, they could scarcely help being otherwise; for while the people of the plain and the bargemen passing through the canal saw Mary but seldom, and worshipped her afar off, Will met her daily, and often of a Sunday walked all or part of the way home with her from the parish church, two miles beyond the hills. In these daily meetings and Sabbath walks he had learned all that was endearingly human about Mary, without setting her apart from ordinary humanity.

She was to him the loveliest and brightest and best girl he ever knew; and his notion of a happy and prosperous future was that he and his father might enlarge the old mill a little, get a bigger wheel—for there was plenty of water-power—increase and improve the machinery; then, that he should marry Mary in the parish church they had so often knelt in together; that his father should give him up half the mill-house, which was too big for the old couple, and that the two families should live in it.

At last he took courage, and spoke of the matter to his father. He said he knew Mary had no money, but that she was good and helpful, and that if they enlarged the mill, and got a couple of hands additional, there would be plenty of business to do and plenty of water to do it with.

The father made no permanent difficulty, and said he would be glad to do what he could to forward his son's views, but that the matter would take some time.

With this answer young Will was quite

contented. He would, of course, have been still more pleased if he could that evening have asked Mary to fix a day for coming finally southward across the canal and taking up her home in the mill-house for good. But he was not hasty or unreasonable, and his father had taken him in a kindly and generous spirit, had told him that although the girl might not own any money she possessed goodness, which was better than money, and so on, a good deal in that strain.

That evening, when he met Mary on the hand-bridge of the canal, where they had so often chatted for hours together, he told her what had passed between him and his father. She was greatly pleased, for all along she had some fear that Mr. Ryland would object to her as Will's wife on the ground that she was not good enough for him. But all this has disappeared for ever, and she felt quite content to live on, for awhile, loving Will as she loved him now, and hoping for the time when she should step across that bridge to be with him for ever. Leaning on this hand-bridge, and looking down into the valley below, the two stood until the July evening threw out long shadows athwart the valley from the western hills. In front of them stretched the straight line of the canal, diminishing to a width seeming no greater than a finger's breadth. All to right and left lay the wide fertile plain, through the middle of which flashed the gleam of the lazy Wander river. Here and there clumps of trees marked the position of a farmhouse; here and there the limits of the fields were marked out by rows of trees, and here and there a streak of naked yellow indicated a road or by-way. No landscape could be less romantic or more suggestive of peace and plenty. The rich pasture below, dotted and flecked with cows, the sluggish, full-brimmed Wander, and the tree-sheltered farmhouses, which suggested undisturbed prosperity, fruitful repose; while the great bar across the vale, the vast dyke, built by human hands to carry the waters of the western hills to Bannermouth, and thus link that mighty port with the inland centres of agricultural produce and manufacture, gave the notion of great enterprise and wealth, which although near at hand, did not obtrude themselves upon the scene.

Behind the lovers yawned the black tunnel. There was silence in the vale, save when a bird sang, or a distant carter cracked his whip, or a farm-dog barked. This was the silence of healthful progress, of noiseless fruition. It was a silence which comforted, and soothed, and cheered one. Behind the lovers was the silence of

the tunnel, a silence blent with impenetrable darkness, telling of no progress, telling of no fruition, harbouring no hope. It was darksome, noisome, loathsome. There was no wholesomeness or good in it. It seemed to swallow up the useful waters of the canal, and give nothing back in return but the chill sense of barren gloom and threats of issues too dire to front.

Between Mary and Will the conversation had gradually slackened as the twilight gathered. It had strayed away from their personal affairs, and began to concern itself with the neighbours and the village of Bancroft, the nearest one to the lock, two miles to the eastward, and towards which the tunnel went.

"I was at the smith's to-day," said Ryland, "down in Bancroft, getting some work done."

The girl started, and looked at him.

"At Eben Dray's?" she said, with a look of disquiet on her face.

He nodded his head.

"And you saw Tom Brindley, the smith's striker?"

Again he nodded his head. He was wondering what caused the strange look in Mary's face. He had never seen anything like it there before.

"I don't like Tom Brindley," she said.

"Why? What's wrong with him, girl?" said he.

She tossed her head and coloured slightly.

"I don't want to make any harm between him and you, Will," she said; "but I wish he would keep himself more to himself."

"Oh, I see!" said Will, with an amused laugh. "He has been making love to you? Then I shall have to be jealous of him?"

"Making love to me!" she cried, scornfully. "Not he. I should like to see him try. But he has been impudent."

"What! impudent to you?—impudent to my Mary? Then I shall have to thrash him, and, by heavens, I will when I meet him! What has he said to you, Mary?"

"Oh, you must not take any notice, Will! It was only his ignorance."

"What did he say?" asked the other, hotly. "Tell me what he said."

"Promise me first, Will, not to notice it."

"No, You tell me what he said. I'm the man, and must decide whether I shall notice it or not."

"He—he met me in the lane over the hill, down by the byre—"

The girl paused, and looked down intently at the black, motionless water at her feet,

"And what?" demanded Ryland, firmly.

"And asked me for a kiss," she said.

"Was that all?"

"That was all."

For a while Ryland looked intently into the water without speaking. He shifted the weight of his body first to one leg, then to the other. He cleared his throat softly, and then, as though he thought this might be taken as a sign of mildness, he cleared his throat in a loud and threatening manner. At last he spoke.

"I'll tell you what I shall do, Mary. When next I meet Brindley I'll say to him, 'Mary Menton is going to be my wife. You let her alone, or I shall have something to do with you!' What noise is that?"

A loud sound had come to them from the depths of the tunnel. For some time back the breathing and footfall of a horse had been audible to them in the tunnel. Now and then the voice of the boy who drove the horse had also been heard, and all along the slight wash of the water divided by the bow of the barge, and flung in little wavelets against the invisible sides of the tunnel. At the loud noise both had suddenly turned round, and looked into the impenetrable darkness behind.

After a moment she answered, "It must be a dunnage plank, that fell from the gunwale into the hold of an empty barge."

In a few minutes the horse and boy became visible in the mouth of the tunnel, and a little later on, the bow of the barge.

Daylight had now almost faded, and it was with some difficulty that, just before the barge emerged from under the arch, the accustomed eye of Mary could distinguish which it was. At last, however, it emerged into the little harbour at the mouth of the tunnel. The skipper called out a pleasant greeting to the young girl, and she greeted him back by name. Two men formed the crew of the barge. Three men stood aft on the cuddy.

Suddenly Mary seized young Ryland by the arm, and whispered, "Come away, Will—come away!"

He glanced at her uneasily for a second, and then fixed his eyes intently on the three men.

"Oh," he cried, "there's Tom Brindley! You run and tell your father there's an empty barge to be locked down. I may as well talk to Tom Brindley now. You had better keep indoors."

She clung to him.

"No, no; come away! Come away with me to our place! I am afraid to leave you here! Come, Will!"

"I will not go!" he said, sternly. "I am able to take care of myself against *him*. Do as I tell you—go! Go at once!"



“‘IT LOOKS LIKE A BAD JOB,’ SAID MENTON.” (See p. 31.)

The girl trembled and looked appealingly in his face. He looked fixedly at her, pointed to the cottage, and tapped his foot slightly on the plank, as though he would brook no delay.

She smothered a cry of fear, and darted away through the dim twilight towards her father's cottage.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGER AT THE "GREEN MAN."

RYLAND walked round to the northern side of the little harbour, spoke a few words to the two bargemen, who landed, followed by Brindley. Taking the tow-rope, the bargemen hauled the boat into the lock. Brindley and Ryland stood looking on until the gates had been shut on the stern of the barge. Ryland turned round, and stared at Brindley from head to foot.

Brindley was low-sized, of massive build, and great strength, as became a smith's striker. He had swarthy skin, black hair, low forehead, furtive, dark eyes, and a forbidding expression. He was not popular in the village of Bancroft or its neighbourhood. He was known to be a man of violent temper. He had often displayed great vindictiveness and cruelty. No one had a good word to say of him; and Will Ryland knew that if he gave him a good thrashing for his insolence popular sympathy would not be with Brindley.

Ryland moved a foot or two nearer to the smith's assistant, whom he had met in the course of business that day, and said, in a low, suppressed voice, "Do you often take a turn in the lane by the byre?"

Brindley glanced for one moment at the face of the speaker, and then turned his eyes quickly away. He looked straight ahead of him, and said, "Ay, I take a turn in the lane by the byre now and then."

These words were uttered in a tone of dogged defiance.

"Well, then, my fine chap, let me give you a bit of advice——"

"I won't take 'fine chap' or advice from you, Ryland; so you can spare your tongue and your wisdom!" interrupted Brindley, with a dark, momentary glance at the other.

Ryland put his left hand on Brindley's right shoulder, and shaking the forefinger of his right hand within a few inches of Brindley's nose, he said, "If ever you open your mouth again to Mary Menton, I'll knock all your black teeth down your black throat!"

"Take your hand off my shoulder," said the other, "or I may show you how that trick about the teeth is done before you had

time to make up your mind to wait till you were more angry."

Ryland now grasped the other with his right hand also, and said, swaying him slightly backward and forward as he spoke, "Remember what I've said, if you want to save your skin—if you want to save your bones."

Ryland was standing about three yards from the edge of the little harbour, with his back to the water. Brindley stooped suddenly, shook the other man's hands off his shoulders, put his hands upon his chest, and pushed him back sharply.

Ryland leaped back to recover himself, put up his hands in an attitude of defence, caught his heel in an iron hook in the ground, and fell backwards into the water.

He disappeared for a moment. The two bargemen uttered exclamations, and they and Brindley watched the surface of the water. In a few seconds he rose, dashed the water out of his eyes with his left hand, and struck out for the bank opposite to that on which Brindley stood. In a few moments he had scrambled out of the water, and was stamping and shaking the water out of his clothes and boots.

The two bargemen waited to see what would occur. They had not been looking at the moment the push was given, and were under the impression that Brindley had deliberately thrown Ryland into the water, and they were anxious to see what would come of the affair.

"He pushed me and I stumbled in!" shouted Ryland; "only 'twas my fault, I should ask him what he meant!"

"You may ask me what I meant, if you like," said the other, "and have nothing but your question for your pains."

"Perhaps," said Ryland, "you may be at the 'Green Man' in Bancroft to-morrow evening. It's too dark to say much to you now, and my clothes are too wet for a talk."

"Any place or time you like," answered Brindley, "will do me. I'll be at the 'Green Man' to-morrow evening at seven."

At these words, Ryland turned away, and went towards the mill. Brindley walked round the little harbour, and as he passed the bargemen merely said, "Good night." He entered the tunnel once more, and walked quietly into the darkness.

All round now in this dark, black vault was silent as the grave. Not a movement could be heard in the waters below; no sound came from either end; the silence was oppressive, maddening. But Brindley was not a man of very delicate nerves, and he strode on in the gloom with as much

unconcern as though it were a cheerful path over the hill. The tunnel was about half a mile long; and when he emerged from the other side, his face was set and malevolent, as though it had gathered evil purpose from the evil influence of that vault.

He struck downwards, and in a short time reached the village of Bancroft. It was now quite dark. He walked straight to the "Green Man" public-house, entered the common-room, called for a pint of beer, and sat down. He filled a pipe, lit it, and thought over the events of that evening.

To-morrow evening, at seven, he was to meet this man—this Ryland—this successful suitor of Mary's. They were to fight. Either of them was to be victor. He had no care for what he should receive. He should try to give as much as he got, or more. He was not afraid to meet Ryland, nor had he any particular anxiety the fight should come off. Ryland was taller than he, had longer reach, and had the advantage of weight; but, then, a smith's striker ought to be in better condition than an easy-going miller. When the fight was over, and one of them had been defeated, and both of them knocked about a good deal, what then? Excepting the black eyes, or battered nose, or cut cheek, there would be no difference in the state of affairs. Ryland would be just as much Mary's accepted lover as ever. What was the good of this "mill?" If he could kill Ryland, and the law would take no notice of it, then all would be right. If he had killed him in a fair stand-up fight, and the law would take no notice of it, the matter would lie very light on his conscience. But, then, this was out of the question. There was to be only a little sparring, some trifling injury to each, which each would get over in a week, and then all would be as it had been before.

True, he, Brindley, was not as well off a man as Ryland. He had only his wages in Dray's forge; whereas Ryland would, no doubt, have a share in the mill when he married, and ultimately the mill itself. Even if he, Brindley, might hope in the end to come in for Dray's business, the latter was comparatively a young man, and Brindley would be well into middle life before he could hope to have a home anything like as good as Ryland could now offer Mary. He knew of no way by which he could mend his fortunes. He was simply Eben Dray's man, and would most likely continue to be Eben Dray's man for many a year yet.

He chafed and fumed at this thought.

He told himself he was as good a man as Ryland, and that he could take as good care of Mary as the young miller. Why, therefore, was he cursed with this poverty? Was it just that Ryland should have all the advantages on his side—stature, good looks, money, and now was to be added the supreme advantage of Mary's love?

He smoked his pipe without moving until the two bargemen came back from the harbour. Their boat had been locked down, and they were ready to start; but they had to await another barge coming up before they could go on their way. Hence, they had the evening at their disposal, and came down to the "Green Man" to taste the ale. They found young Brindley in the common-room by himself. At first they only nodded to him, taking it for granted that his mind was occupied with the possible events and issue of the following evening. But in time a slight conversation sprang up, in which the two bargemen gave him the benefit of their observation, experience, and hints connected with personal encounters.

While they were speaking, a fourth man—a stranger—entered the common-room, and sat down. He called for a pipe, tobacco, and beer. He was a burly, jovial, communicative man of forty-five years of age. He soon got into talk with the two bargemen. He asked them about the neighbourhood. They explained that they were merely passers through, and that Brindley could give him much more information than they. He then turned to the young smith, and poured out a volume of talk which almost overwhelmed the brooding young man.

He told him he had just come back from Australia, where he had done very well in the wool business; that he could put his hand on a trifle of money if he knew any way in which it might be well invested; that he had come home for a long holiday, and was not quite sure he should not stop at home altogether; that, in fact, he had made his money, and did not care about the future; that he was on a walking and riding and training and canaling tour, just as the whim took him; and that he had engaged for that night the only bed there was to let in the "Green Man."

To all this young Brindley replied at no greater length than the commonest civility demanded. And then came the time when the stranger, who told him his name was Mayfair, began to ask questions. To these also Brindley replied in the briefest possible manner.

When the stranger saw he could get little or nothing out of the young smith,

he turned once more to the two bargemen, and little by little it leaked out that there was to be an encounter to-morrow evening between Brindley and the young miller.

Mayfair shook his head appreciatively, and said, "We are the only nation, sir, in which men will, in a friendly and obliging way, stand up and get hammered, sir, and hammer back again for the sake of good fellowship. It is a long time since I saw a fair go in. May I ask is the affair public?"

"No," said Brindley, with a dark frown; "and the less that's said about it, the better."

"Beg pardon, I'm sure!" said Mayfair. "I did not mean to intrude. I am a stranger, so I hope you will excuse me."

"We didn't know you wanted to keep it dark, Tom. If we did, we shouldn't have said anything about it. But as the gentleman is a stranger, there's no harm done."

"If you want to keep it quiet," said Mayfair, addressing Brindley, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I don't know either of you, and I shouldn't show fear or favour if I did. I used to be a bit of a bruiser when I was young. If you want to have it on the quiet, suppose I go with you and see fair play?"

"That's a fair offer, Tom," said one of the bargemen. "There's a nice quiet place at this end of the tunnel; a lord couldn't want a better place for a licking. What do you say, Tom?"

"I'd rather have it private than with a crowd," said Brindley, still sulkily; "and if the gentleman will do what he says, and Will Ryland is agreeable, I'm agreeable too."

It was settled that nothing more was to be spoken of the fight by any of the four men in that room for the present, and that things were to be left as they stood until Will Ryland came over the next evening.

CHAPTER III.

TWO MEN MISSING.

WHEN Mary got to her father's cottage, she found he was busy in the garden. He had left her to watch the lock while he took a spell at the hoe. He saw at once that something was amiss with the girl.

"What is it, Mary?" said he.

"Oh," she said, "Will is vexed with Tom Brindley, Eben Dray's man, and I am afraid there is going to be bad work between them."

She then explained, at some length, all the facts of the case; how Tom Brindley had spoken to her in the lane, how she had

told Will Ryland of the matter, and how the latter had bidden her go into the house while he spoke to the young smith. She also told her father that Tom Brindley had come from the other end of the tunnel in an empty barge, and that he was now at the harbour, where she left Will, who said he would speak to him then and there.

The father made light of the matter, and to show her how little importance he attached to it, went on with his work for a few minutes longer. When he came to the harbour to lock the barge down, he found she did not intend going on that night, that Will Ryland had fallen accidentally into the water, and that Tom Brindley had gone in his homeward direction through the tunnel. He also was told that a hostile meeting was arranged for the next evening. As the barge was to remain in the harbour that night, and not be locked down, he had nothing particular to do, so he went over to the mill-house, and asked for young Ryland.

The young man was busy changing his clothes, and the other had to wait some time before he could see him. When at last he appeared, the two men walked out in the dark July night, along a rising path that skirted the stream which fed the mill-pond.

"Mary tells me," said Menton, "that you are going to call Tom Brindley to account for some nonsense he spoke to Mary in the lane. The men told me about your ducking, and that you and Brindley are to meet to-morrow evening and have it out. Now, what's the good of that? What's the good of you and Brindley bashing and mashing one another for half an hour, only for foolishness?"

"It will teach him manners, and to let what belongs to other people alone."

"If you take my advice," said Menton, "you'll let the thing be, and not get talked about all over the parish for a hot-headed fool!"

"They may talk of me as they please," said Ryland, "all over the parish; but I'll shut *his* mouth, any way. I'll stop his prate, if I have to choke him with his own teeth!"

"And you won't take advice from a man old enough to be your father?"

"Ay, that's where it is. You are old enough to be my father, and you can't have my feelings in the matter. It's best for us to have it over, and be done with it," said Ryland. "We'll know all about it at eight o'clock to-morrow evening, and then it won't trouble us again."

The subject was not further proceeded with, and in a short time both men re-

turned to their homes, and were soon in bed.

Before they separated, however, Menton had said that the quieter the thing was kept the better, told Ryland not to mention it even to his father or their man, and said he would not himself speak of it to anyone.

Next day passed without any feature of excitement to disturb the even current of events at the mill or the cottage. Ryland purposely avoided meeting Mary; and in order that she might not intercept him, he left the mill half an hour earlier than usual, and sauntered in the direction of the village.

He was of course much too early, for it was only half-past five o'clock; so instead of going through the tunnel, which was a short cut, he took his way over the hill. Even by doing so, and walking in the most leisurely manner, he found he should have nearly three-quarters of an hour to spare; and having come within three or four hundred yards of the "Green Man," he sat down and lit his pipe, to get through the time.

As he was so seated, there came along the road towards him, with impressive agility and vigour, the stranger, Mayfair. Mayfair was walking alone. He had no one to speak to. He had nothing to say to anyone, and yet he was most impatient to be talking. Accordingly, when he came up to where Ryland was sitting, he wished him good evening, and asked him if he could oblige him with a match. The young man returned the salutation, and offered him a light. This afforded Mr. Mayfair an opportunity of thanking the young man profusely, commenting on the beauty of the evening, referring to the prospects of the harvest, and imparting a brief epitome of his history, position, and hopes. He, too, sat down, and having said that he had nothing to do for close upon half an hour, the conversation went on. When it was time to go, both men rose, and to Mr. Mayfair's delight, he found that his companion was bound to the same place as himself—namely, the "Green Man." It was just seven when they both entered. Brindley was already there, and in a few minutes Ryland knew that the man he had accidentally met on the road had offered his services as umpire, and that Brindley had accepted them. Ryland saw no reason to object to this arrangement, and the three men set out on foot for the eastern mouth of the tunnel, where it was arranged the encounter should take place. An hour afterwards, Brindley re-entered the "Green Man." There were only two or three men

in the common-room. He sat down, called for a pot of beer, and drank half of it at one draught. Then, setting down his measure noisily, he said, vigorously, "Well, that's over, anyway!"

"What?" said the men.

"Didn't you hear," he said, looking round, "that young Ryland and I were to have a turn-up this evening?"

"Never a word," said the spokesman of the party.

"Well, we had," said Brindley, "fair stand up and knock down, you know."

He looked around to see if they were attending. Their undivided attention was given to him.

"Ay," said the spokesman, "that's fair. What was it about, Tom Brindley, and how did it go?"

"I asked his sweetheart, Mary Menton, for a kiss."

"Ay," said the spokesman, making no comment this time.

"And we quarrelled about it, and had it out this evening in the bit of level ground at the mouth of the tunnel. I gave as good as I got, I think. Mr. Mayfair, the stranger stopping here, saw fair play. There were four rounds. Then Mr. Mayfair said that was enough, that we had both proved we were good men, and that it was a pity we should maul one another any more."

"And he was right," said the spokesman. "Wouldn't young Ryland shake hands with you, and come back and have a glass, to show he bore no ill-will?"

"I think he would," said Brindley, "only he was in a hurry to get home, and he said he'd go by the tunnel. Mr. Mayfair, who never was through the tunnel before, said he'd go with him, to see what 'twas like, and the two set off together. Good night, meh," said the young smith, after draining his measure.

Then he left.

Although Mr. Mayfair had engaged the bed at the "Green Man" for that night, also, he did not return.

Nothing was heard of young Ryland up to ten o'clock, when his father and Gregory Menton took a lantern and entered the tunnel at the western end, with a view to reaching Bancroft and making inquiries about the missing man.

CHAPTER IV.

WHO DID IT?

THEY had proceeded more than three-fourths of the way through the tunnel when Menton, who was leading, uttered a shout of surprise and consternation. Mr. Ryland hastened to the front. He found

Menton standing still and swinging the lantern over something lying on the tow-path.

"What is it?" he cried.

"It looks like a bad job," said Menton.

"Why, it's Will!" said old Ryland, falling against the side of the tunnel.

Menton stooped down, and leaned over the prostrate man. The latter was lying on his back across the tow-path, with his feet towards the water, and his head partly supported by the base of the arch.

"He's all right, I think, Mr. Ryland. Hurt his head, or something of that kind. Ay, here's the blood. He must have fallen against the arch and got stunned. Shall we take him ourselves or get more help?"

The father roused himself.

"You're sure the boy is not dead?" he asked.

"Quite. I can hear him breathing."

"Then let us carry him between us. He might die while we went for help."

The two men lifted the inanimate form from the ground; then catching a right and left hand beneath and grasping a right and left arm behind his back, they rose, and walked slowly homeward. They did not speak until they reached the mill house. Here they bore the injured man to his own room, placed him on his bed, stopped the mill, and sent the man off with all speed for a doctor.

In time the surgeon came. He pronounced the injury serious—dangerous, but did not give up hope. The superficial wound was slight; the loss of blood had not been great; the cause of insensibility was not weakness, but concussion of the brain. The man was young and healthy—two things greatly in his favour—and with care and attention to his instructions he hoped that all would yet be well.

Menton went home, and found Mary anxiously awaiting news. He told her that Will had met with an accident, that he was not very well, that the doctor had been with him, and that no doubt her lover would be better in the morning.

She pleaded hard that she might be allowed to go and see him, to sit up with him, and tend upon him; but this she was told could not be. The doctor had said nothing could be done for the present beyond carrying out the instructions he had given, part of which was that his mother was to sit up with him all night.

The landlord of the "Green Man," finding that midnight did not bring back his guest, and knowing nothing of young Ryland's condition, called up the potman, and having heard the story of the fight given by Brindley, and that the two men,

Mayfair and Ryland, had gone into the tunnel with a view to walking to the lock, resolved to go through it himself, and if he found no explanation there to make inquiries for the missing man at the mill. He also took a lantern with him, and, accompanied by the potman, set out.

It was close to one o'clock when these later searchers entered the eastern end of the tunnel, and proceeded westward. The landlord carried the lantern, swinging it as he went a few inches above the ground.

He had not gone very far when he stopped suddenly, with an exclamation of horror. The potman drew close, holding the lamp an inch from the ground, and close to the base of the arch the landlord pointed at a large patch of shining red.

"Blood!" he said, hoarsely. "That's blood!"

"Ay, 'tis," said the potman, shivering, and drawing back a little.

"Foul play," said the landlord. He raised the lantern up, and held it so that the light fell on the inky water of the canal. "Try if you can see anything," he said to the potman.

Suddenly the latter threw out his arm, and pointing towards the opposite side, whispered, in a tone of misery and fear, "There—there! Look there!"

The innkeeper moved the lantern so that the light might fall more fully in the direction indicated.

"It's his hat," he said; "it's Mr. Mayfair's hat. Someone has murdered him, and thrown his body into the water."

For several moments the two men stood gazing in speechless and motionless horror at the black object floating on the opposite side of the water. At last the landlord spoke,—

"John, you run on to the lock, and tell the men what it is. Let them bring boat-hooks. I'll stay here with the lantern."

"Me go by myself, sir, in the dark? I dursn't do it for my life. I'm half silly with fear as it is."

"Well, then, take the lantern, and I'll stop here."

"Don't ask me to go alone, and leave you alone in this awful place. It would be enough to drive you mad to stop here by yourself, and enough to drive me mad to think of your being in this dreadful place alone."

"Well, if you won't go alone," said Edwards, the landlord, "let us go together, and lose no more time."

The two men set out at a quick pace, and in a few minutes reached the little expanse of water forming the harbour by the mill. They noticed the lights were not yet out in

Menton's cottage. Edwards approached and knocked. Menton asked, "Who is there?"

"The landlord of the 'Green Man.' We want you at once."

Menton opened the door. He had taken his coat off, and was about to retire for the night. Edwards put his hand upon his shoulder, and drew him out into the open air.

"Do you know anything of young Ryland?" asked the landlord.

"Yes; he had a fight with Tom Brindley to-night, and must have got the worst of it. His father and I found him in the tunnel three hours ago. He is lying like a log in bed, without sense or reason. The doctor has been to him, and isn't quite sure he'll ever recover."

"What!" cried Edwards. "How can this be? I tell you, Menton, there's been foul play somewhere. A gentleman that was stopping at my place is missing to-night, and there's a pool of blood in the tunnel."

"About three-parts through?"

"Yes," replied the landlord.

"In by the wall?" asked Menton.

"Ay; in by the wall."

"That's where we found Ryland. He was bleeding there. He must have fallen there after the fight."

"But what brings the stranger's hat floating in the canal?"

"Lord have mercy on us! What are we coming to? What is the matter? You are right; there must be foul play! But who did it?" cried the lock-keeper, dazed with dismay.

"If two men were walking through that tunnel, and one of them had any reason to quarrel with the other, he might, in trying to push the other into the canal, get pushed back himself against the wall. One man might be knocked senseless, the other might be drowned."

"Oh, oh, oh! You make it worse and worse, Mr. Edwards! Why should young Ryland quarrel with the stranger?"

"Why should the stranger's hat be found in the water, opposite where you found young Ryland senseless?"

"Lord have mercy on us! It looks black!"

"Tom Brindley says Ryland was not much hurt in the fight; that the stranger stopped the fight before much harm was done on either side, and that the two men went into the tunnel together."

"It looks black—I own it looks black! God help my Mary, if there should be anything in it! I thought, when I came away from the mill-house, I had the worst news

I could bring, except I had to say he was dead; and now this looks like worse news than it would be even if he was dead. Let us say nothing more about it just now, but go and see."

He went into the cottage, and returned with two boathooks and a lantern. With these and the lantern they had already brought the three men set off through the tunnel. Here, after a brief search in the water, they found the body of Mr. Mayfair, quite cold.

Leaving the two lanterns beside the body, and Menton to watch it, Edwards and the potman set out for the village. They roused several of the people, the two constables among the rest, and informed the latter of the circumstances of the case, as far as they knew.

Among those who were first stirring was Tom Brindley. There was much discussion in the common-room of the "Green Man," which was converted for the occasion, with the consent of the police, into an informal inquiry office. Here Brindley repeated circumstantially his version of the affair; and when pressed to account in some way for the awful occurrence, said he did not wish to have any more to say to it, for the sake of the neighbourhood, but asked if anything had been missed from the body.

Towards morning a search was made, and it was found that the watch and money of the deceased was missing.

Upon this, search was made here and there, and the watch of the late Mr. Mayfair was found in the pocket of the still insensible Will Ryland.

CHAPTER V.

MARY'S EXPEDITION.

THE little village was filled with consternation next morning. It could not, and it would not, believe that Will Ryland had murdered this stranger for the sake of his money. And yet it was impossible, taking Brindley's statements and the subsequent facts into account, to form any other theory of the crime. If Ryland and the stranger had gone into the tunnel together, if, subsequently, Ryland was found insensible and in such an attitude as would naturally lead one to think that he had fallen or been thrown backwards from the edge of the water, and if in the water almost directly opposite where he lay the body of the stranger was found, less watch and money, and the watch subsequently discovered in the pocket of Will Ryland, there was a very ugly case indeed against that young man.

But what had become of the money? It

was not known how much the stranger had had by him, but the sum was believed to be considerable. Whether it was in notes or gold no one could tell. If it had been in notes, no doubt the notes had been destroyed; if in gold, no doubt it had been preserved.

The previous night Menton's great care had been to conceal from his daughter as much as possible the gravity of Ryland's condition. To-day he had no hope of being able to keep her apart from the awful rumours creeping about. Will Ryland was still insensible; the surgeon, at his morning visit, had said there was only a slight change, but this was for the better. No new facts had been gleaned, and the people were stupid and suspicious with horror and shame.

At last the whole matter came to Mary's ears. At first she could not collect her faculties sufficiently to understand the meaning of the words she heard. But when it became plain to her that Will Ryland was tacitly accused of having made away with Mr. Mayfair, all her mind was fixed with a sudden ardour, and she declared her intention of never resting until the matter was cleared up. She saw the matter in a light different from all others; for not only was she guided by the light of love, but also firmly led by the belief that jealousy had as much to do with the matter as plunder.

What was she to do? Whither should she go first? How should she begin?

For a long time she sat in the living-room with her face buried in her hands. All was difficult and dark before her. For a while she could see no clue to take up, no way to adopt. It was breakfast-time before she made up her mind to do anything, and even then she kept her resolution to herself. But as soon as breakfast was over, and her father had gone into his garden, she slipped out, and taking the tow-path on the lower level of the canal, walked rapidly westward. She evidently had some design in her head, for she never paused until close upon an hour afterwards, when she arrived on the western side of the Wander valley. Here she asked the lockman when had Matt Hopkins's barge gone through?

"About half-past nine last night," answered the man.

She knew Hopkins's barge was going to Bannermouth, and that Bannermouth was eight miles off. Without pausing a moment longer than to receive the lockman's reply, she set off rapidly still westward along the tow-path. It was past one o'clock before she reached the town of Banner-

mouth. She was insensible to fatigue. She had only one thought in her head, and that was to meet Matt Hopkins, and ask him why he delayed leaving the mill harbour until twelve hours after the appointed time for his departure. For although the barge had got locked down the morning before, it had not started westward until after eight that night. It so happened that no other barge except the one for which Matt Hopkins was waiting had passed through that day, and that, her father being busy from sunrise to sundown in his garden on the day of the fight, he did not notice that the barge lay to in a little elbow of the canal, shaded with tall shrubs, a short distance westward of the eastern lock.

Mary had no difficulty in finding Hopkins's barge. It had gone into one of the Bannermouth docks, and was taking in a load of coal.

She called Hopkins to her.

He recognised her at once.

"Why did you wait all day long in the creek below our lock?"

The man looked at her as though he was about to resent the inquiry.

She fixed her eyes firmly upon him.

"Matt Hopkins, this is life or death. Murder has been done. Answer me at once!"

"Murder!" he cried, in horror. "You don't mean to say Will Ryland is dead? It was a fair fight as far as I saw. Me and my mate were in the tunnel. The three men came up. The smith and the miller set-to. It didn't last above ten minutes. Then, just as the night before, when Ryland was stepping back, he fell. His head came against a stone or something. He didn't come up to time. The other two went to him, and lifted him up. He was bleeding from the head and senseless. We saw the fight was over. We had stayed too long to see it, and ran back as fast as we could to the barge."

"Then you'll have to come with me, Matt Hopkins, back to Bancroft, and tell what you saw. You and your mate will have to come, for Will Ryland is at death's door, and the strange man was murdered and robbed, and your story is not the same as Tom Brindley's. He says there was little fight and little hurt, and that Will Ryland and the stranger walked into the tunnel together."

"Then he lies!" cried Hopkins, excitedly, shaking his fist; "and I and my mate will go and testify that he lies, and that your man was knocked out of time, and could not come up, and was senseless as a beam of wood, and could no more walk than a stone. We'll go and testify to it, Mary

Menton, although we may lose our situation for owning we lost twelve hours to see the fight; but Black Tom Brindley shall not put murder on your man for the sake of that or anything else that we can do. Your man is worth a dozen down-eyed, sly, dark chaps like that!"

Now, for the first time, Mary was sensible of fatigue, for now, for the first time, she felt relief. She sat down on some timber lying by, and burst into tears. Hopkins's story might not be enough to establish the innocence of her lover, but it was a flat contradiction of Brindley's account of the affair, and this was like the dawn of hope.

Hopkins tried to cheer and support the girl. He made her take some milk; and having called his mate, and found substitutes to carry on the work, the three set off for the head of the canal.

Mary suggested that they should walk back, but of this Hopkins would not hear. In half an hour a barge was to start, and by this he insisted they should go.

Mary thought this journey would never be at an end. But at six o'clock the barge entered the little harbour under the mill, and Gregory Menton, to his great relief, saw his daughter once more; for he had been in sore distress about her, and at times had thought that the tragic events of that unhappy district had not ceased with the night before, and that his lovely daughter had in some way or other fallen under the scythe of fate.

CHAPTER VI.

THE END.

By the time Mary and the two bargemen returned to the mill harbour, affairs, as far as young Ryland was concerned, had assumed a disagreeable appearance. Depositions had been made before a magistrate, and the coroner had been communicated with. The injured man's consciousness had returned, but he was dazed, and seemed incapable of recalling anything which had immediately preceded his injury. The surgeon ordered that he should not be questioned or excited in any way. He forbade the patient to be stirred, and in the face of this order a constable was placed in the house. Down in the village feeling had begun to take a turn against young Ryland, now that it had been ascertained he was no longer insensible.

The bargemen briefly told their version of the tale to Menton, and then he called upon Mr. Ryland; and leaving Mary at home, the two bargemen, the miller, and the lock-man set out for Bancroft village.

It was about seven o'clock when the four men turned into the common-room of the "Green Man." Mr. Ryland having heard that the magistrate was still in the inn parlour, went to the remaining constable, and told him the bargemen's story. The constable crossed the road with the miller, and took the two men who had come from Bannermouth into the room where the magistrate sat.

In a short time Matt Hopkins and his mate emerged from the parlour, and took their places in the common-room. Here, bit by bit, their story was told, and an immediate revulsion of feeling took place in favour of Ryland; while, although no words of accusation were spoken, the feeling of the dozen men or so assembled evidently pointed the finger of suspicion at Tom Brindley. Presently the constable appeared, and calling to two men, who followed him, left the inn. In a short time they returned, with Tom Brindley walking beside the constable. He smiled malignantly at his old comrades as he passed through them to the parlour. A messenger was now despatched on a car to the mill, and in less than half an hour the car returned, bringing the messenger and the constable who had been left in charge. Then, between the two officers of the law, Tom Brindley marched out of the parlour, mounted the car, and was driven off to the nearest station, in charge of the police.

Next day, the house in which the young smith lived was searched from top to bottom; and as though he had been deserted by the most ordinary prudence in his hour of temptation and crime, not only was a large sum in gold found, but the pocket-book, containing one hundred and fifty pounds in notes, belonging to the murdered man. Brindley had evidently considered his position so secure and the chance of detection so remote, that he had taken no precautions of concealment whatever.

The place where the encounter between himself and young Ryland had taken place was one so sequestered and sheltered from observation that he might well have believed nothing short of a miracle could bring the deed into public light; because for miles to the eastward the Bannermouth Canal was visible, and any barge or man advancing along it or the tow-path would have been clearly discernible, while all round were steep slopes, bare of trees along which no one could approach without being seen, and where no one came in the discharge of any duty or business. To the west rose the hill through which the tunnel went, and the crown of this hill

above the tunnel was cut off by a high stone wall. A barge could not advance through the tunnel without giving notice of its approach by the sound of the horse's hoofs. Only by the accident that the bargemen knew the meeting was about to take place, and the still more remarkable accident that they dared to delay twelve hours on their journey, in all likelihood no version of the circumstances, save Brindley's, would ever have been credited.

It was more than a month before Will Ryland was able to leave his room. Then his version of the affair tallied exactly with that of the bargemen. The theory of the prosecution when the trial came on was, that Brindley having a grudge against Ryland, being poor and in love with Ryland's sweetheart, saw, when he found the young miller insensible before him, the means of getting rid of his rival, covering him with the deepest infamy, and acquiring money at the same time. Their version of the murder was, that when Ryland was stunned, and Mayfair and Brindley bent over him, the latter, taking advantage of the defenceless position of the former, threw him into the canal, and kept him in until he was drowned; then that he drew the body through the water a distance into the tunnel, dragged the insensible Ryland to

the same spot and left him there, and then, taking up the murdered man's hat, which had been knocked off in the scuffle on the bank, flung it into the water opposite where Ryland lay. In confirmation of this theory, blood-stains were found from the place where Ryland had been knocked down to that in which he had been discovered; and certain marks on the clothes and body of the murdered man enabled the doctors to swear that they had been inflicted shortly after death, and that they might have been caused in the way described.

The jury did not deliberate more than ten minutes. The judge passed sentence, and in less than a month from that day, Tom Brindley was no more.

Many summers and winters have passed since then. Will and Mary's eldest boy is now old enough to cause his mother great anxiety by straying away among the fields and getting lost for hours together. For such wanderings he is not severely dealt with.

There is one place his errant feet have never yet brought him; he has heard so much of it that it has taken to his mind the form of a substantial terror, and that is the eastern tunnel of the Bannermouth Canal, where the gentleman was murdered years ago, and his father lay for dead.

THE HAUNTED HANSOM.

BY HOWELL DAVIES.

CHAPTER I.

SOME twelve months before the date of my story I had been fortunate enough to secure a junior partnership in the house of Campbell and Merrivale, stock and share-brokers, who were known in the City as an eminent and old-established firm.

John Campbell had been a dear school and college friend of my father's, was a trustee under my father's will, and had given still further proof of his friendship by readily promising my mother, on her deathbed, that he would look after me as though I had been his son.

I was then a lad at school; and the death of my parents left me in possession of a modest competency, which during my minority was carefully and judiciously "nursed" by my excellent guardian. In short, he kept his sacred promise so faithfully that at twenty-eight years of age I found myself in the very comfortable position I have intimated. I liked my work, had plenty of friends (as prosperous men always have), and had no just cause of quarrel with my lot in life.

I am not by any means a superstitious man. The mysterious influences under which some folks seem to exist, and from which they profess to derive a melancholy pleasure, have no part in my busy life. Morbid fancies have no affinity with active occupations.

When a man has to secure the necessary sustentation for the physical existence of himself and family by elbowing his way through the unsympathetic, unscrupulous crowds who dog the steps of the fickle goddess, his imaginative powers are pretty certain to be kept under healthy control. Such has been my experience; and I want my readers to bear this in mind, if they

care to peruse the strange story I have to tell.

Whether it be deemed interesting or not, it is certainly a fresh confirmation of the well-worn aphorism that "truth is stranger than fiction."

Some four years ago, on a certain twenty-third of December, I was sitting in my cosy bachelor quarters, alone, with the indispensable pipe in my mouth, having a "good think."

By the way, what a wonderful assistance to the process of thought is the fragrant weed!

I sometimes try to imagine what the life of a lonely man who doesn't smoke must be like. I've tried to contemplate the abstruse question from every point of view, and with as little prejudice as it is possible for an inveterate smoker to feel, but I am bound to confess that hitherto the problem has baffled me.

Why are so many bachelors hurried perforce into ill-assorted marriages every year?

Simply because they've never learnt what an amount of unselfish companionship and calm philosophy is to be found in the bowl of a well-coloured meerschaum.

On the day in question I had been detained at the office rather later than usual, as the next three days were holidays; so that when I got home, and had disposed of a substantial dinner, with eminent satisfaction to my inner man, I wasn't at all sorry to draw up my snug arm-chair to the fire that blazed cheerily in the grate, light my pipe, and fall back upon my "inner consciousness" for a quiet meditation.

Christmas was at hand, with all its probing memories redolent of sunnier days. Time was—and not so very long ago—

when the weird season was indeed a festival for loving hearts and smiling faces who sat at the hospitable board in our old house at home. Then an indulgent father's cheery greeting welcomed my return from school, and the warm caresses of a tender mother's lips made sweeter the benediction of that holy time.

Ah! those were happy days. Why is it that we poor mortals, in our pitiful blindness, never see the full beauty of such times and seasons until they are for ever gone? Did the sweetness that haunts us in the after years have a real existence then?—or is it that memory, by some fanciful trick, concentrates all the illumination of intervening years upon that far-off glorified spot?

I cannot tell. I only know that, young, prosperous, esteemed as I was, on that chill December evening, I would have readily—ay, cheerfully—given up all those coveted possessions for

“But one touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still.”

However, I've my story to tell, and mustn't stay to moralize now.

In the midst of my meditations there came a knock at my door, which effectually aroused me, and the servant entering, placed in my hands a telegram.

Now, although the receipt of that masterpiece of modern science was a matter of the commonest occurrence during business hours, I must plead guilty to a feeling of considerable surprise, almost amounting to trepidation, as I hastily tore it open.

I needn't have alarmed myself, for its perusal gave me nothing but satisfaction.

Was that strange thrill which shot through me at sight of the familiar brick-coloured envelope the mere effect of being suddenly awakened from a gloomy train of thought, or was it a premonition of the awful task which a relentless destiny was forcing upon me, and which I was powerless to repel? Who shall say?

Have not the wisest and best of us experienced this inexplicable emotion at some time or other—this strange sense of a cold, cruel hand clutching at our heart-strings, or a grim shadow of impending evil crossing our path?

Napoleon Bonaparte felt it at every crisis of his marvellous life, and it made that hard-headed hero as superstitious as the veriest school-girl.

Well, something of that sort came upon me as my trembling fingers tore open the telegram, but the next moment I laughed at my stupid folly.

The message ran as follows:—

“T. Lawrence, The Priory, Southfield, to Martin Bennett, 116, George Street, Hanover Square, London.

“Have just arrived home. Come down to us for Christmas. Shall expect you by first train in the morning.”

Dear old Tom! this was just like him, impetuous and warm-hearted as ever. As a lad he was the same—always left everything to the last moment, and then, by some unaccountable witchery, always did the right thing, and made everybody comfortable once more.

He and I were at school together, and from the first the thickest of “chums”—foremost in every conceivable piece of mischief, and, as a natural consequence, always in “the heel of the hunt,” where intellectual pursuits and scholarly attainments were concerned.

At the conclusion of that happiest time of one's life, we drifted apart, as school-boys do. Tom went into the army; I embarked on the treacherous waters of the Stock Exchange. In the usual course of his military life, Tom was ordered abroad, and, at the date of my story, had returned on leave, after having spent three years at the Cape.

We had written to each other, perhaps, half a dozen times during that absence, and Tom's last letter contained a vague hint of the likelihood of his being in the old country again before very long. Nothing more definite than that; so that his telegram was really no surprise to me. As I say, it was just Tom's *modus operandi* in all he did.

Now, this kind invitation came just in the nick of time. I had one or two places “open” for Christmas, where I knew I should be heartily welcomed, for (pardon the conceit, dear reader!) I was not altogether an ineligible *parti*; and fond mammas, from the most disinterested motives, generally met me with smiling faces and gracious words.

Yet there were few places where I felt that I could spend a really “Happy Christmas.” Indeed, I had more than half determined—misanthropist as I was—to spend the festive day alone, relying upon the unfailing companionship of my books for entertainment that would, at any rate, possess the advantage of unobtrusiveness.

Tom's genial, unsophisticated invitation drove this half-formed resolution out of my mind at once, and on the spur of the moment, yielding to the rush of sunny

memories borne in upon my heart, I hastened to prepare for my journey into the country. There was ample time; the train didn't leave Paddington until 10.40, and it was now eight o'clock.

My roomy portmanteau was soon packed, my cigar-case well filled, my mystified landlady informed of my sudden freak, and myself comfortably ensconced in Hansom cab No. 00911.

Amongst my numerous peculiarities, all more or less characteristic of a fidgety bachelor, is a habit I contracted long ago of always looking at the number of a cab before getting into it.

"How absurd!" exclaims the easy-going reader.

Perhaps so, my friend. The sequel will show.

CHAPTER II.

As soon as I was seated, and had placed my rugs and small portmanteau by my side, I lit a choice Havanna, and under its soothing influence allowed my mind to wander back, over the haunted ground of memory, to the old days when dear Tom and I shared our school-boy triumphs and consoled each other under its griefs.

What halcyon days they seemed *now*, and, ah, how far away! We had both exchanged the mimic warfare of the playground for the real, earnest, cruel battle of life—the awful fight going on from day to day, in which so many good and true men go down fighting bravely to the last.

What immortal honours are won on this field! But as the crowning of these heroes takes place beyond our human ken, we make no note of it. And so the world rolls on!

Musing thus, I had drifted quite away from present surroundings, and was lying back in the cab, with closed eyes, lazily puffing at my cigar. The ceaseless roar of that most mysterious of all oceans—London life—seemed a fitting accompaniment to my dreamy thoughts.

Suddenly I was awakened from my reverie by a terrible feeling of chilliness, as though a blast from a northern ice-field had swept by me. At the same time, a deep, blood-curdling groan close to my ear caused me to look quickly round. Great heavens! what a sight met my fascinated gaze! On the seat beside me sat a ghastly figure, that I instinctively knew belonged not to the bustling, noisy world around me.

The apparition was that of a young and handsome man, little more than a lad, in fact. Round the high white fore-

head clustered masses of short golden curls; on the upper lip was a slight moustache that marked the borderland between youth and manhood; every feature was as delicately chiselled as a woman's, and yet the face bespoke the promise of great manliness and high courage.

But it was the eyes that first riveted my attention. They were of a deep intense blue, and under happier circumstances must have been veritable fountains of laughter and love. As they were slowly turned upon me, their wild, appealing, hunted look was terrible to behold. I candidly declare that I never thought or could have believed it possible for human eyes to have held such a burden of horror in their depths. Agony, remorse, entreaty, despair—all were depicted in that soul-consuming glance.

Heaven forbid that my eyes should ever look upon such a sight again! After the first shock of fright, which was succeeded by an unnatural calmness, such as animals are said to manifest under the transfixing orbs of the serpent, I noted that my supernatural companion wore evening dress.

On one of the delicate, high-bred hands sparkled a diamond ring, and in the centre of the shirt-front a single stone of great purity flashed and shimmered in the flitting lights of the Edgware Road, through which we were being driven.

But what is the meaning of that crimson stain on the snowy linen? Horror! it is a stream of blood, which is oozing from a wound under the left breast, and is steadily trickling over the white expanse, cut clean through, as if from a quick stab!

I saw it all in a moment then. A cruel murder had been committed, and this poor restless spirit was claiming inquiry and vengeance at my hands.

But why at *mine*? I had never seen that beautiful, boyish face before. I knew nothing of its melancholy history.

Again the supplicating eyes were turned upon me; the rigid lips moved with a convulsive twitch, and forth from between them issued a groan of mortal anguish that paralyzed my throbbing brain, and made my very heart stand still. I lost consciousness. The next thing I remember was the cheery, matter-of-fact voice, of my Jehu, exclaiming, "'Ere ye are, sir! Pad-din'ton, sir!"

I got out as one in a dream; saw a porter taking things from the very spot where my awful visitor had sat, without any remark beyond the stereotyped question "Where for, sir?"

I answered him quite as mechanically,

and turned to pay the cabman. To this day I don't know what I gave him. It must have been something handsome, for it drew forth from that representative of a useful but frequently discontented class a fervent "Thank ye, sir. A merry Christmas to you."

As he turned to drive off, the number of the cab again caught my eye. Yes: there it was, a simple row of five figures; nothing more. Yet to me, at that moment, those numerals were as terrible and fateful as was the mystic writing on the palace walls to the Assyrian monarch. They burnt themselves into my bewildered brain, never to be erased whilst memory held sway.

With a strong effort I pulled myself together, walked into the booking-office, and took my ticket for Southfield.

The busy scene around me served, in some measure, to draw me out of myself, and to dissipate the effects of the horrible experience through which I had recently passed.

I tried to argue with my own heart on the absurdity of allowing myself to believe that I had really seen a ghost. I, a man without an atom of superstition in my whole moral economy, and generally credited among my daily acquaintances in business with the possession of more than an average share of shrewdness and hard common sense—I to be tormented with a visit from a disembodied spirit! It was too absurd! Why, I must have fallen asleep, and had a bad dream, and there was an end to it! So said common sense—or, rather, that childish fear of being thought foolish which we frequently designate common sense.

Still, argue as I would, I knew the dread mystery was no vision in sleep, and an indefinite *something* within me stopped the incredulous sneer at my own weakness that was rising to my lips.

In this frame of mind I entered a well-lighted first-class carriage, and having made myself thoroughly comfortable, commenced my long railway journey. For I must tell you that Southfield was a long way from London. It nestled in snug retirement on the far-off western coast, on a branch line, twenty miles from its junction with the main line. So I had plenty of time for thought, if I'd wished to think. That, however, was just what I didn't want to do.

Before leaving my warm bachelor quarters, I had comforted myself with the assurance that I should sleep soundly all the way down from Paddington. Being a tolerably experienced traveller I could invariably manage that. For once I had

reckoned without my host, or, more strictly speaking, my *guest*.

There was to be no sleep for me that night, nor the next either, if I'd only known it.

Do what I would, that agonized face, with its story of a hidden crime, rose before my mental eye, and drove away all inclination to rest.

Must I confess it? *Fear* kept me broad awake. Fear, lest if I closed my eyes, I should find on opening them again, that same awful presence before me. We laugh at the terror a little child displays in the presence of some forbidding-looking stranger, and yet what abject cowards, what veritable infants, the wisest and strongest of us are when we come face to face with the supernatural or the inexplicable. Heaven help us, then! for our vaunted reasoning powers offer but sorry consolation.

My journey, however, was not interrupted by any further adventure; and on reaching Southfield, I had sufficiently recovered from my fright to be able to conceal all traces of anything extraordinary having occurred.

In the gray dawn of the chill December morning we glided into the silent little station, where a sleepy porter and an unhappy-looking boy were the sole representatives of authority at that early hour.

I was glad enough to reach my destination, you may be sure, and still more pleased to see my old schoolfellow on the diminutive platform, though I should hardly have recognised him had it not been for the cheery tones in which he welcomed me, and in which I could not fail to detect the old happy ring of the voice I had heard so often in the bygone days.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRIORY was distant some three miles from Southfield, and as we drove through the High Street of the sleepy little town there was hardly a soul in sight. A mongrel cur at the door of the principal inn, annoyed at our unlooked-for appearance at such an unearthly hour, saluted us with a noisy protest on behalf of the slumbering inhabitants; whilst a half-awakened ostler at the same establishment ceased his out-door ablutions to give us a surly recognition as we rattled by.

The rising sun gave promise of a bright cold, genuine mid-winter day—a promise that was amply and beautifully fulfilled by-and-by.

How delightful the country looked as we drove briskly through it that fair morning!

All nature seemed to smile a merry Christmas welcome, as if conscious of the sweetly solemn season. At least so it seemed to me, just released from Babylon and its jarring sounds and murky canopy of fog. How vast a store of misery and crime, of heroic endurance and greedy cunning, of brave Christian helpfulness and more than fiendish vice that same grim canopy covers!

I felt like one transported into a new world that morning. Under the bracing influences of the weather, our brisk drive, and Tom's lively conversation, I rapidly regained my wonted elasticity of spirits, and the hideous events of the previous night lost their hold of me for the time being.

"There's the dear old place!" said Tom, as we turned a sharp corner, and came in view of a fine old mansion situated on a gentle slope facing the sea.

I have little or no architectural knowledge; and even had I possessed ten times the amount I did at that time, it would have puzzled me to say which of the various orders prevailed in the construction of The Priory. There were corners and gables of every conceivable form, and in all imaginable positions. Yonder loomed out a broad bay-window, and beside it an ancient Gothic light. Here a low French window opened upon the bright, smooth lawn, whilst, far above it, quaint dormer panes admitted the day.

Perhaps my best description of the house would be to call it a perfect specimen of the eminently-comfortable order. It certainly was that.

I have visited it many times since that eventful morning, and each succeeding visit has but served to confirm my first impression as to its sweet homeliness, its quiet, inviting comfort. Never have I seen a place which so thoroughly realized my idea of what a true English home should be.

No wonder in our boyhood's days Tom used to speak of it with such tenderness and affection. It was indeed a home that any lad might be proud of. Moreover, it had been in his family for generations, and was intimately interwoven with all its traditions.

Little did I think, as I entered its friendly portal, that my coming would produce the effects it did.

On entering, I was at once shown to the rooms that had been set aside for me in the very pleasantest part of that very pleasant house. As soon as I had removed the grimy traces of my all-night journey, I found my way down to the breakfast-room, where Tom and a young lady stood at the

low window feeding some hungry little birds gathered in a chirping crowd on the lawn.

Lawrence at once introduced me to the young lady as his sister Beatrice.

Now, I'm not going to attempt a description of the most indescribable thing in nature—a bright and beautiful girl. In all my reading I have never yet come across a word-picture that did anything like justice to such a subject.

We read of girls graceful as Hebe and lovely as Venus, and how much the wiser are we? What do you or I, dear reader, know of those mythical, and probably over-rated, females of antiquity? I wager you that we have in these degenerate days many a maiden in our quiet English homes before whom the gods of old would have bowed with a lower reverence and a wilder passion than was ever evoked by their own aesthetic damsels in their palmiest days!

I have a shrewd suspicion that in my heart of hearts I considered Beatrice Lawrence one of these incomparable beauties.

She gave me a frank and hearty welcome to The Priory, so that I sat down to our comfortable breakfast in a very happy frame of mind, and with an exceedingly voracious appetite for the good things set before me.

Mrs. Lawrence did not put in an appearance at the early meal; but later in the day I was presented to her, and a sweet, matronly old lady she was. Her face must have been wonderfully handsome in its youth; now there were deep lines on it, which gave it a look of intense, almost painful melancholy—lines that it was easy to see had not been carved by the patient hand of Time, but that seemed rather to have been rudely chiselled by the cruel strokes of some stupendous sorrow.

Withal it was a grand, sweet face, and one that commanded love and esteem from all.

The day passed off pleasantly but quietly. Tom had so much to tell me and so many questions to ask, that the hours flew by on rapid wings as we strolled about the fine old park, or wandered on the beach near by.

Of course, the stables were inspected, the dogs introduced, with a due acknowledgment of all their exceptional merits, and the gun-room overhauled.

So the day wore on, and evening came, with its quiet comforts.

When we were in the drawing-room, awaiting the announcement of dinner, Beatrice seemed unusually gloomy and *dis-trait*.

Rousing herself with evident effort, she



"WHERE TOM AND A YOUNG LADY STOOD AT A LOW WINDOW." (See p. 40.)

turned to me, and with one of her rare smiles, said, "I'm very much afraid you find us dull company to-night, Mr. Bennett. But it has been an inflexible rule of my mother's, for some years now, to spend Christmas Eve as quietly as possible. So you must make the best you can of a stupid family party!" she added, gaily.

But as she turned away from me, I fancied I saw her lip quiver and her lovely eyes fill with something suspiciously like tears. Could I have been mistaken?

We shall see.

Though we were but four, the dinner was not by any means a dull affair. Indeed, it would be impossible to feel gloomy in the presence of Beatrice Lawrence's fascinating face and ways. Without at all approaching that *bête noir* of young manhood—a blue-stocking—she had read enough to be able to join in a conversation, which would have been a Chinese riddle or a Dutch conundrum to the majority of young ladies.

She possessed a keen wit, and had a certain charming way of "putting a fellow down," that to my infatuated mind and heart was sweeter than any flattery I'd received from other lips.

Yes, we were a quietly happy little circle that evening round the amiable widow's dinner-table. How short and deceitful was the calm!

I have heard it said that at certain times there falls upon the beautiful Bay of Naples a calm unwonted even in that sunny clime. There is no rustle in the fragrant myrtle groves; the olive-trees cease their graceful swaying to and fro; the vine hangs heavy on the trellis; there is no voice of bird, or insect, or whispering breeze; the very waters hush their murmur as they touch the silent shore. Then the dwellers in that delectable land know that Vesuvius is gathering all its fierce artillery together for one of its wild *feux de joie*.

So is it in our lives, whatever our lot may be. So was it in that peaceful home-circle at The Priory that Christmas Eve.

Shortly after we had joined the ladies in the drawing-room, a company of carol singers stationed themselves on the lawn beneath the window, and charmed our ears and touched our hearts with their simple, plaintive music.

What memories those strains awakened in my heart! what emotions stirred my breast!

Our voices were hushed, our conversation was dropped in a moment.

Suddenly the silence in the room was broken by a stifled moan, expressing the

keenest agony of soul, followed by bitter sobbing.

Looking round, I saw Mrs. Lawrence hurrying from the room, weeping profusely. With a hastily-whispered apology, her daughter followed her, and Tom and I were left alone.

And up through the clear, silent, frosty night came the voices of the singers, in softened harmony. How well I remember to this day the pathetic words they chanted to a plaintive tune—words that wrung those anguished sobs and tears from that patient mother's heart.

How much she had suffered I was soon to know!

CHAPTER IV.

"COME into the billiard-room, Martin," said Tom, in a moment or two. "We sha'n't see mother or Beta again to-night. Whilst we smoke, I've something to tell you, though it will cost me no little pain."

"Dear old friend," I replied, taking him by the arm, "if the telling of it, whatever it may be, will cause you a pang, I would rather it remained for ever untold."

"Generous and thoughtful, as in the old days," he answered, with a sad smile; "but it is due to you, as my guest and oldest friend, that some explanation of this evening's occurrences should be given you."

When we'd reached the billiard-room, and had seated ourselves, one on each side of its merry sea-coal fire, I again urged Lawrence to consider his own feelings rather than a fancied duty to me; but it was no use.

So having lighted our cigars, we sat and smoked in silence for a few minutes. As I watched my companion's face, I could see that he was struggling with strong emotions, and in my heart I pitied him, for I knew the womanly tenderness of his brave disposition.

At last he broke the spell, and looking me steadily in the face, began his absorbing story.

"You must have noticed, Martin, that my dear, good mother is prematurely aged, and that all to-day she has been under the cloud of an unusual melancholy; the carol-singers brought it to a climax to-night, and you must have wondered why their homely strains should have so utterly broken down my mother's self-possession. She is naturally of the brightest, happiest disposition. Heavens! how she has suffered though, and yet lived through it all.

"My father's death left her with the heavy charge of a young family on her hands. But even then, tenderly as she

mourned her beloved partner, she kept up the cheerfulness of the dear old home, and lived only for her childrens' happiness and well-being. Ah, her great sorrow hadn't come upon her *then*,—the sorrow that whitened her locks with the snows of an untimely winter, and drove the light and gladness from her bosom!

"We were three children. I was the eldest, then Beta, and next to her Charlie, the pride and darling of the household. How we petted and did our best to spoil him from morning till night! The dear mother loved us all very truly and tenderly; but Charlie, her youngest born, was as the very breath of her life.

"He grew up a fine, handsome lad, and chose the medical profession. So at nineteen he was articled to an eminent London doctor.

"I need not tell you how sadly he was missed from the home-circle. He went up to town in May of that year, and from time to time wrote us, in his happy boyish style, glowing accounts of his pleasant London life, and the delight he took in his professional studies. Very often he would add a postscript that he knew would bring the happy tears to the mother's eyes. 'How glad I shall be when Christmas comes, for I shall be *home* then.'

"Christmas did come round at last; and just a week before, Charlie wrote that he would leave London by the 10.40 train on the evening of the twenty-third. He couldn't get off until that day, and by leaving his journey until the last train, he would be able to attend Lady Southfield's dinner-party that evening. The Southfields have that handsome place on the hill which we passed in driving from the station yesterday; but since Lord Southfield's death her ladyship declares that she cannot exist out of London.

"Well, the twenty-third of December came, and every preparation was made for the reception of the pet of the household. My poor mother's excitement was intense. I never saw her in such spirits—I've never seen her look happy since!

"All that night she lay awake, longing for the daylight that should bring her boy to her. As I drove off in the breaking dawn to the station, she drew aside her window-blind to see me start.

"Alas! alas! it was all in vain—all in vain!

"I reached Southfield platform some ten minutes before the train was due. How long those minutes seemed!

"At length the train came lumbering in, and I scanned each carriage as it passed.

"Strange! I could see nothing of Charlie, nor get any tidings of him. I turned into the station disappointed and sore at heart, yet comforting myself with the thought that he would be in by a later train."

Tom's voice broke, and with the tears coursing down his bronzed, handsome face, he sobbed out, "*Martin, we never saw our dear lad again.*"

"I hurried up to town by the last train that afternoon, when I found he didn't come and had sent no word. I didn't know what to fear.

"He was ill, perhaps dying, and even now I might be too late. I was indeed too late, but not in the way I supposed. I would to Heaven it had been so!

"As soon as I reached Paddington, I made careful inquiry of the officials, and found *Charlie's luggage (labelled for Southfield) in the cloak-room.* It had been brought there by a messenger, early in the evening of the twenty-third. That was all I could gather, except that no first-class ticket for Southfield had been issued on that or the succeeding day.

"I then drove direct to my brother's rooms in the Albany, only to find that he had sent his portmanteau, &c., to Paddington by a trusty messenger, who had returned and handed him the cloak-room ticket just as he was getting into the cab to drive to Lady Southfield's, in Grosvenor Square.

"It was now nearly ten o'clock on Christmas morning, and away I posted to her ladyship's residence, in the hope of seeing her before she went out to morning service.

"I knew her sufficiently well to be sure she would forgive the intrusion at such an hour; and I was not mistaken.

"I made an attempt to conceal my agitation as my kind old friend came forward, and shook me warmly by the hand; but she saw at once, with a woman's keenness, that there was something wrong."

"What is it, Tom? What's wrong? Has anything happened to Charlie? You've not come to tell me that our handsome, darling boy is ill?"

"And the kindly Dowager's eyes filled with tears.

"You see, Martin, they all loved our dear lad and his sunny ways. Lady Southfield had always been as a second mother to Charlie and me from our infancy. She had no children of her own, so she lavished all her affection upon us.

"I told her of the mysterious disappearance of Charlie, and asked her whether

he had dined with her, as he intended doing.

"Yes; he came amongst the first," she exclaimed—"to have a nice chat with me," he said, before the "lions" arrived. He begged me to excuse his leaving at ten o'clock, as he was going home for Christmas, and wouldn't miss his train for the world. He seemed in unusually high spirits, and at table was the gayest of the gay. He confided in me that it was *all* because he should so soon be with the loved ones at The Priory."

"And so we talked and speculated, and the darkness in our hearts deepened.

"Then Lady Southfield sent for the footmen who were in the hall when Charlie left.

"They both remembered his going away. One of them had called a hansom cab for him, and heard him tell the driver 'Paddington.'

"Well, Martin, dear friend, to shorten my painful story, from that point I lost all trace of my brother, for whom I would have given my life. I advertised, and searched, and inquired; I employed a keen and skilful detective; but all in vain.

"Four years have passed away—for it happened at the time when you were in South America; but we have heard nothing of him who is worse than dead.

"When I went abroad with my regiment, I took his last photograph with me, vainly hoping that I should some day come across someone who could give me news of 'the loved and lost.'

"Disappointment has been my lot, hope deferred my dreary company, since that terrible time.

"So now you can understand the strange occurrences of this evening, and the reason why there was no company invited to meet you."

Long before Tom had finished his strange and startling narrative, I was as excited as he was himself, and felt the deepest, acutest sympathy for my old schoolfellow and those who had suffered with him.

I clasped his hand, and comforted him with all the consolation I could find words to express. I am afraid it wasn't much, though.

After a long and painful silence, which I felt was too sacred to be disturbed, Tom drew from his breast-pocket a photograph-case, and handed it to me, remarking, in a broken tone, "That's all we have left."

I took it from his hands with reverential touch, and opened it with all tenderness.

As the light fell upon its contents, it dropped from my paralyzed grasp.

It was the face I had seen in the hansom!

CHAPTER V.

WITH a great cry of terror and amazement, I started to my feet, and confronting my astounded companion, gasped out, as if every word would choke me, "Tom—I—saw—him—last—night!"

Lawrence's hands gripped my shoulders in an iron grasp; his face became ghastly in its excitement, as he hissed out between his clenched teeth, "Saw *him*?—you saw *Charlie*?—and last night, too? Where? In Heaven's name, *where*?"

Then the reaction came, and I told him all.

There were no tears in the fierce eyes that glared upon me as I finished my horrible narrative. There was no tremor in the hard, cruel voice, so unlike Tom's cheery accents, that fell upon my ears after a momentary pause.

The whole man was changed in that brief space of time. In the place of the loving, emotional, heart-sick brother stood the stern and pitiless avenger of a brother's blood!

"He has been murdered—foully, cruelly murdered, poor lad!" said the harsh voice. "And all these weary years his blood has been crying aloud for vengeance, and yet *I* knew it not!—I, his brother! Oh, my God, it is hard—it is pitiful! But he shall be avenged *now*; for I swear, by my hope of heaven, never to rest until I have discovered his murderer, and brought him to his doom!"

"Come!" he exclaimed, hurrying from the room; "there isn't a moment to be lost. You and I will go up to town at once. A quick train passes through Southfield a little after midnight. In the meantime, I must take Beatrice partly into my confidence. She is a clear-headed little darling, as well as a warm-hearted one, and will find some good excuse to satisfy the dear, heart-broken mother."

We hastened to our respective dressing-rooms, and were soon in travelling costume.

I went back to the drawing-room, where Tom had agreed to join me.

In a few moments he appeared, with his sister at his side, pale and trembling, but making a brave fight, as only a woman can, to conceal the emotions under which she was labouring.

She came quickly towards me, and, in tones that thrilled through my whole being, cried, "Oh, Mr. Bennett, Tom tells me you have brought him some news of

Charlie, our darling, handsome boy! Have you seen him? Is he alive? Is he ill, or in want? Tell me all you know; do, please! I am his sister, his *only* sister. I ought to hear all, whatever it may be. He loved me very, very dearly, did Charlie!" she sobbed. "And, oh, how I idolized him!"

What could I say in reply? Was my hand to be the one to demolish all her hopes, and realize her worst fears at one fell stroke?

No one knows the anguish that tore my heart at that moment.

Before I had time to frame a soothing reply to her passionate questionings, a servant entered, and requested her presence in her mother's room.

Thus I escaped.

Tom and I reached London in the gray dawn of Christmas morning, and as the train drew up to the platform at Paddington I saw my excited companion shudder. Was it some sudden memory of that other Christmas morning, when he had come up to pursue his futile search for him who was the sunshine of that loving home-circle where his glad smile beamed never again, and the music of his laughter was heard no more?

We drove at once to Scotland Yard, and placed our supernatural evidence before one of the shrewdest officers of the Detective Department.

As I told my story, I could not fail to notice the grim smile that stole over the man's impassive features.

He evidently looked upon me as a timid, superstitious fool, who had mistaken incipient *delirium tremens* for an important revelation of crime. But when I mentioned the number of the cab, his expression changed, and by the time he had had Tom's version of the mystery which had enshrouded his brother's disappearance, he had become as interested and excited as either of us.

You see, these professional stoics are very human after all!

Detective Sandell lost no time, but set to work at once.

He found his task a much easier one than he had anticipated. In less than a week he brought us news which confirmed our worst fears. Charlie had indeed been foully murdered, and his murderer discovered!

The detective laid the whole story before us.

He had gone first to the owner of Hanson No. 00911, and had made cautious inquiries as to the men in his employ. Those inquiries elicited the fact that the man who

drove the cab in question, at the time of the supposed murder, had disappeared from amongst the fraternity of "Jehus" altogether.

Oddly enough, his disappearance occurred in the spring of the following year, when he stated that he had been left a little money by a distant relative. The cab-owner had remembered it well, because of that somewhat unusual circumstance, "as legacies wasn't much in a cabby's line."

"Yes; Jim Bullen was a decentish sort of fellow. Steady as a clock, but a rum temper. Where did he live? Somewhere down in Stepney. Couldn't remember the name of the street. Married? No, sir. Lived all by hisself. His pals on the rank used to call him the 'Hermit.' Hope there's nothing wrong. Should be sorry to hear Jim had got into trouble."

Sandell then found one of Jim's old chums on the rank, who recollected "the 'Ermit's' luck ven 'e dropt into that bit o' tin. 'Adn't seen much of 'im for a long time arter that, but 'spotted' 'im t'other day doing 'sandwich' at the corner o' Tott'n'am Court Road. Hawful seedy 'e looked, too. Got thro' all 'is quids long ago, and was 'anging out somewhere about Vitechap'l now,

For some two days and nights after this, the detective had hung about Whitechapel and its unsavoury surroundings, scouring all its likeliest dens in search of his man.

At length he ran him to earth in a miserable garret, questioned him as to his past life, and, to make a long story short, got out of the wretched creature sufficient to justify his arrest, on suspicion of having caused the death of Mr. Charles Lawrence.

The poor whining, half-starved wretch was removed in custody that evening, and locked up, pending the magisterial investigation in the morning. But when Sandell and the policeman in charge entered the cell early next day, they found their prisoner raving in a paroxysm of insanity.

Medical aid was at once called in, but too late to save him.

Drink and destitution, aided by the un-sleeping pangs of conscience, had done their ghastly work all too surely.

As the afternoon gloom deepened, he passed beyond the jurisdiction of earthly tribunals, dying with a mad imprecation upon his lips.

It was during those frenzied moments in which the day passed that he acted over again the awful tragedy of that Christmas

Eve, four years before. Piece by piece it all came out, down to the smallest incident, forming an unconscious confession of one of the most cowardly and cold-blooded crimes ever committed by the hand of man—the cruellest, the most diabolical of all animals!

Here is the narrative in brief:—

As Charles Lawrence stepped into the hansom, on that fatal night, the glitter of his diamond stud and ring caught Jim Bullen's covetous eye. He longed to possess what appeared to him to represent fabulous wealth. Longing gave place to the murderer's reckless determination.

Swiftly and cautiously lifting the little trap-door in the head of the cab, he struck his unsuspecting victim a sharp, well-directed blow upon the head with a heavy iron "spanner."

With a stifled cry, the handsome, innocent lad fell back stunned.

The murderer wheeled his horse round, and drove like a fury to his lonely hovel in one of the lowest quarters in Stepney.

Once there, he felt that he was safe from detection and consequent punishment. He bore his unconscious but still breathing victim into the dark, solitary cottage, and snatching up a knife from the one rickety table, plunged it into the heart of the lad, for whom mother, and sister, and brother were at that moment waiting, with loving solicitude, in a far-away country mansion.

Hastily divesting the beautiful corpse of every valuable, the villain hid it away in a corner of the hovel until he should return. Shortly after midnight he got back, and locking himself in with his ghastly accuser, he carefully barricaded door and window. He then stripped the bruised and lacerated body, and buried it deep beneath the hearthstone of his miserable hut.

When the "hue and cry" for the missing lad had pretty well died out, his brutal murderer disposed of the valuable jewellery, for a considerable sum of money, to a notorious thieves' "fence," from whose hands of course it speedily passed.

The criminal then took to the inevitable resource in all such cases, and sought to drown, in the madness of intoxication, the stings of a conscience that could never know rest again.

He succeeded in some measure whilst his ill-gotten funds lasted; but when they gave out, hope died within his haunted brain, and a constant agonizing fear of retribution took its place.

And so he sank lower and lower, until it wanted but the knowledge that his awful

crime had been discovered to crush him into the grave.

This was the substance of the detective's story.

Lawrence sat as one petrified, until the distressing, harrowing tale was all told; then he sprang to his feet with a terrible oath, and whilst the knotted veins seemed to start from his forehead, he gave vent to the rage and disappointment consuming his heart.

"My God! Foiled—foiled, and within reach of vengeance, too! I would have staked my soul for one chance of cursing the wretch ere he went to his doom! The murderer of our brave, bright boy to die uncursed, unpunished! Oh, it's terrible!"

"Ah, sir," said the detective, "if you'd seen the awful end he made of it, even *you*, sir, wouldn't wish him a worse fate than that!"

CHAPTER VI.

LITTLE more remains to be told. Under the supervision of the police, a search was made for the remains of Charlie Lawrence in the place where the miserable house of his murderer formerly stood; and there we found the ghastly skeleton—all that was left of that which once was so bright and beautiful.

That same evening Tom left for home, to break the harrowing intelligence to the fond mother and sister. In the morning I followed with the remains, which were laid by loving hands to rest in the family vault at Southfield.

I returned to London and its business worries, as one who had been suddenly awakened from a hideous nightmare.

In little more than a month, I was again summoned to the house of my boyhood's friend.

Once more it was a house of mourning.

The mother's loving heart, unable longer to sustain its agonizing load of grief, had given up the fight and gone to rest.

I found Beatrice and her brother plunged in the profoundest sorrow. Ah, there is no human desolation to be in any way compared to a mother's place suddenly left vacant!

It is, indeed, *the* one irreparable loss, in a world of change and disaster.

As the earliest and purest love of our hearts entwines itself around her who bore us, so the bitterest tears that can ever bedim our eyes fall upon her grave.

I remained for nearly a fortnight at The Priory, and then with difficulty tore myself away from its grief-stricken inmates.

One of them had crept, all unconsciously, into my heart, and brought me thrilling glimpses of new and sweet possibilities.

* * * * *

My last visit to the dear old English home was made in the early summer of

this present year of grace. Need I detail the object of my journey?

Let it suffice that when I left its hospitable roof Tom alone remained in charge.

Here in my cosy suburban home I find the hurrying feet of Time move far too quickly.

But I musn't stay to moralize, for Beatrice is waiting to be taken out, and she is an awful little tyrant in her way.

It is such a sweet way, though!

THE CAPTAIN OF THE FORTUNE.

A NAVAL TALE.

BY PERCY B. ST. JOHN.

CHAPTER I.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE FORTUNE.

H.M. FORTUNE was one of the smartest frigates in the British service. It had been on foreign duty, and was now being refitted. Its crew had been transferred to the guard-ship or given leave of absence, as it was well known that when the time came for her to be re-commissioned under Captain Arundel, they would gladly hurry to rejoin their beloved commander.

Though rather young, he had seen some service, such as could be had in those piping times of peace.

He had gained his promotion in consequence of his bravery in the China seas, while chastising certain local pirates, who, but for the ubiquity of the British navy, would infest those seas and others, to the great detriment of our commerce.

Even as it is, these nefarious cruisers are to be found in more parts of the world than one, and there can be no doubt that many a vessel reported lost has been the victim of these villains, who, creeping out at night, under the cover of darkness, from their secret creeks and other sheltered places of resort, surprise the unsuspecting seamen, and rob and scuttle the ships.

"Lost with all hands!" is the report; the insurance is paid, and there the matter ends.

In front and almost in sight of Gibraltar a case of piracy happened not a very long time ago.

Captain Henry Arundel had come down to resume his command and see for himself to the absolute fitness of the vessel for a cruise, when he should be required by the Admiralty to start.

All his officers had arrived in obedience

to orders, and the men were returning with scarcely one exception to their duty on board ship.

Captain Henry Arundel was about seven-and-twenty, an active, handsome young man of good connections, but moderate means beyond what he might expect from his profession.

His father had been in the navy before him, but his elder brother Charles had chosen the Civil Service in India, where he held a high and important post.

They had an uncle a baronet, with a considerable rent-roll. He had been married, and several children were born unto him, but there remained only one son, a very delicate youth of nineteen.

Upon him the hopes of Sir Walter were entirely centered. After him his nephew Charles would be the heir.

The uncle had proved their true and loyal friend, their generous friend; but he had himself no fear but his son would live.

He knew him to be delicate, so he took him to the south of France during the more trying months of the year, and there could be no doubt he was getting stronger rapidly.

Two days before the vessel was to be put into commission again the Port Admiral invited Captain Arundel to a *tête-à-tête* dinner.

When the cloth was removed, and they were alone, the Admiral conversed for awhile on different topics, and then began.

"Fill up another glass, Arundel. I have something to say to you in strict confidence. Hence no one has been invited but yourself to-night."

"I am all attention, sir," replied the

young captain, smiling; "and shall be as dumb as a fish."

"I know it, Arundel," his superior resumed. "Now, I have been consulted by the Admiralty in relation to sending out a vessel, swift sailing, well officered and manned, on special service. I have thought of you."

"You are very kind, indeed!" said Arundel, colouring with genuine pleasure.

"Well, I am aware that you are anxious to be doing something," continued the Admiral, "so will at once explain as much as I am allowed to do. You are aware that of late several rich vessels have mysteriously disappeared on their way home from India?"

The time, be it remembered, is fifteen years ago, when several singular losses were constantly being reported, especially in the *Times*.

"It has been spoken of, sir, by naval men," replied the young captain.

"We know the casualties to which vessels of all kinds are subject," said the other; "but allowing for the naval losses, one or two—nay, several, first-class ships, quick sailers, and well commanded—have disappeared, and all about the same spot."

"Indeed!" replied Captain Arundel; "this, I confess, is a novelty to me."

"It is a fact," said the Admiral. "Have you any objection to undertake the duty of discovering the delinquents?"

"It would give me the greatest pleasure!" earnestly replied the young officer. "You know I have little but my profession to look to."

"That is enough. You shall have the command," was the answer. "When can you be ready?"

"This is Monday. I shall be ready on Thursday," was the response.

"Then I will telegraph to-night to the Admiralty," the Admiral said.

And so it was arranged.

Next day the young officer was duly sent for by the First Lord of the Admiralty, by whom he was well received; and after receiving minute verbal instructions, received sealed orders, to be opened when he reached a certain longitude and latitude.

He at once returned to Portsmouth, where he had left the *Fortune* in charge of his first lieutenant, William Travers.

This officer was a most active and intelligent man, as the first lieutenant ever should be, as on him more than upon anyone else depends the efficiency of a vessel in time of need.

On the Wednesday, the Admiral gave a dinner and evening party to the officers of

the *Fortune*, inviting many others to meet them.

Of course, no one had any idea of their destination; nothing more was known than that they were going on a lengthened cruise.

The evening was a very enjoyable one, and long remembered by some of the young ladies and gentlemen who were present.

Next day the lively and well-appointed man-of-war sailed out of port on its adventurous voyage.

About the same time there started from Calcutta a very fine specimen of an Indian man, bringing away a number of invalids and others returning home to recruit their health or enjoy the fruits of their arduous labours.

It was a magnificent sailing vessel, commanded by a very clever seaman, Captain Harcourt. It was well found and well appointed, and consequently there was every prospect of an agreeable and pleasant trip home.

Of course there was a great variety of people on board, children going to school, wives going to visit the homes of their youth, and old officials who never intended returning to so hot a clime again.

One of these was a judge, a man not more than fifty, but who, having remained during the whole of his career in India, had retired on his full pension at this early age.

With him was his daughter, Lucy, a charming true English girl of eighteen, who had braved two voyages in order to see her father and bring him safe home.

Sir Ralph Morton was naturally very proud of her, and she was the admiration of all the young men on board.

For a day or two there was not much intercourse between the passengers, as the weather was slightly rough; but presently everything settled into the usual routine.

All the passengers then appeared at breakfast, tiffin, dinner, and tea, while groups collected beneath the awning that overspread the quarter-deck.

The most assiduous admirer of Miss Morton was Charles Arundel, the elder brother of the young captain of the *Fortune*.

He was invalided home. There was nothing very serious the matter with him; but after an attack of jungle fever the doctors thought a holiday trip would do him good.

Nothing loth, the young man turned his face towards England for a brief while.

He had met Miss Morton in society, and had conceived a very strong passion for her. But this fact he kept to himself, for

the judge was rich, crusty, and not likely to give his daughter and heiress to a man who had his way yet to win in the world.

His uncle was of an age to marry again.

A very intimate friend of the judge, Captain Bennett Spencer, of good family, and considerable expectations, was favoured by Lucy's father, and took care to let people know it.

But Lucy Morton appeared to be wholly heart-free. She laughed and talked with both—with anyone who could get hold of her, but allowed no one to feel that she had any preference.

The girl was blooming, sprightly, sweetly beautiful. Colour, form, and expression were all perfect. Everybody said so. But she was still a girl, and seemed to wish to retain her girlhood as long as possible.

She was under the chaperonage of a Mrs. Farquharson, a widow, so that Sir Ralph—he had been knighted for eminent services—could enjoy the society of his old cronies without the least anxiety about his girl.

Behold, then, Lucy on deck, seated on a stool, while Mrs. Farquharson occupies an arm-chair by her side, doing some crochet work. Lucy has enough to do to converse with Charles Arundel and Bennett Spencer, the former of whom, on the plea of being an invalid, reclines on a tiger-skin at her feet, while the other leans against the bulwarks.

They are both very much taken with the sweet girl, and do their best to make themselves agreeable. They are also both very clever talkers, but Charles is the better read and the more versatile, and Captain Spencer is often obliged to hold his tongue and bite his lip because the conversation goes a little beyond his depth.

Charles is a universal favourite on board. He had been an enthusiastic and untiring sportsman, so could talk on the one eminent topic of Anglo-Indians, and win the hearts of the men. He was none the less an enthusiastic and tireless talker, and thus he found his way to the hearts of the women.

In addition to his insinuating tongue he, had a handsome face and a tall, athletic figure—all traces of his illness were gone—which contributed not a little to his success with the ladies.

But though there were few young ladies on board who did not secretly admire him, he never showed any great preference for one more than another.

This seemed very much to annoy a Miss Eleanor Estcourt, an acknowledged belle, a girl of the cold and stately class, with classical beauty and a pale face.

Whatever might be her real feelings, she evinced great liking for Charles Arundel.

It was impossible to be rude to her, while he could not but feel a little flattered by the marked preference she showed him.

Occasionally he was compelled to rather neglect the real queen of his heart; but it went against the grain sorely, and he returned to his allegiance as soon as possible.

All this time they were making progress. Several weeks passed away, and they had settled down into quite a community of intimates.

Of course there were rivalries and jealousies; but not more than is seen at most little watering-places.

Captain Harcourt and Temple, his chief mate, were men of experience and forethought.

One or the other was always on deck, but hitherto their presence had not been required for anything more than ordinary duty.

But when five weeks had elapsed there came a great change in the weather—nothing less than a severe gale, which blew them before the wind and, as far as they could judge without taking observations, out of their course.

Captain Harcourt became rather uneasy.

"I say, Temple," he said to his first officer, "you must keep a sharp look-out. Set all the best men to the fore. I think we have had the worst of it; still, by the chart,"—which was on the table—"I know that we are probably in a dangerous quarter."

"All right, sir," replied the other; "but excuse me, I do not think we have had the worst of it. The storms in these latitudes often turn and come back."

And he fixed his keen eyes to leeward, the direction a sailor watches most eagerly.

"I shall leave you on deck for the present, Temple," the captain continued. "I must go below and console my numerous flock. Send a hand down if I am wanted."

And the worthy skipper left the deck.

The chief officer walked up and down, with his hands in his pockets, gave a keen glance at the binnacle compass, and then looked about him.

There was a very dark cloud, blacker and lower than any of the others, which hung over the horizon to leeward—that is, in the opposite direction from which the wind came.

He knew that it meant mischief.

Without a moment's hesitation he took off some of the small quantity of sail which the ship carried, just as, after a moment's lull, during which the ship righted, the

storm swept over them, and the vessel was pressed down to her very bearings by its mighty force.

This was followed by loud thunder, preceded by rapid flashes of lightning.

The captain was again on deck by this time, seconding the earnest labours of the first mate.

Once more the wind blew wildly; but shortly afterwards out of the storm-cloud came torrents of rain, which beat down the wind for awhile, but did not prevent the ship from being rocked in the trough of the sea.

The yards were squared, the topsails taken in, and everything done that was in the power of man.

The intensity of the darkness, with the blinding deluge of rain, materially delayed the efforts of the crew, but at last the captain's orders were executed.

Lucky that it was so; for scarcely were the preparations complete than a fresh gale was upon them from an opposite direction to that from which it had before come.

The Dublin Castle was thrown on her beam-ends as it was, and the men were cast into the lee scuppers, with everything on deck that was not properly secured.

The captain and the chief mate waited for one moment, standing with some of the best sailors near the helm, which was hard up.

"The masts must go, Temple," said Captain Harcourt, in a low, earnest tone.

"Yes, sir," replied the chief mate, who was already armed with an axe in expectation of this order.

"Lose no time," continued the skipper, in a low, earnest voice.

His object was to put her before the wind, when she would probably right herself.

Three men, with axes, went to work with a will.

Then, as they hacked and hewed, the lanyards gave way, and the good ship Dublin Castle lay dismasted, as far as the after spars were concerned, and dashing headlong before the wind.

CHAPTER II.

OPENING ORDERS.

WHILE this rather tragic affair was going on, the Fortune frigate was at no great distance buffeting with the same gale.

Vessels of war are so well manned that generally they are better able to meet such contingencies than even the best appointed merchantmen.

It so happened that the Fortune

weathered the storm without any casualties beyond what could be repaired in an hour.

On the morning after the misfortune which happened to the Dublin Castle the gale continued, but the sun shone brightly and warmly.

Sailors have naturally a horror of darkness, as under the veil of night they never can tell what dangers they are confronting.

The wind was still blowing a strong but steady gale.

The sky was bright and clear. Not a sign of land was to be seen.

At twelve o'clock Captain Arundel, having seen to the latitude, called his second officer, Lieutenant Travers, to his cabin.

The steward brought wine, after which Captain Arundel opened a drawer, and produced a packet with the Admiralty seal upon it.

"Travers," he said, "I have already hinted that we are on special service. I have now to open my sealed orders. Help yourself to the wine."

The lieutenant obeyed, while the captain read his brief despatch.

"Near the spot where you will open this document," it said in brief, "several vessels have been lost. There are, out of the regular beat of ships, numerous islands, which, it is feared, are the resort of a gang of pirates of all nations, runaway sailors, and others. It has been asserted by several captains that only by the exercise of great caution they have avoided being surprised by these men, who come out in boats, trusting to dark nights and an insufficient watch.

"It is possible that by cruising about the locality you might help to solve the mystery.

"It is quite within the range of possibility that the casualties may be due to storms, which have driven ships out of their course, in which case you will perhaps be able to find some trace of the lost vessels. Three vessels, the Dublin Castle, the City of Glasgow, and the Red Chief, are expected home by this route."

Then followed some other official directions, with a chart of the seas.

"It is a very responsible task, Captain Arundel," said Lieutenant Travers, gravely; "but it is the opinion of not a few people in London that there has been foul play committed. The ocean police has put down open pirates; but we know that even on the opposite coast to Gibraltar vessels have been captured and sacked by boats running out at night."

"Yes," replied the other, gravely. "Well, we must do our best. Whether we

discover a nest of scoundrels, or only some forlorn, shipwrecked people, we shall have done our duty as English sailors."

"Yes, sir," said Travers.

"I think that we had better try and sight these islands first—from a distance," continued the captain. "Then, at night, we can lie-to in the usual course of Indian men, and furling all sail, make ourselves invisible."

"That's it—exactly what I thought of!" cried Travers, enthusiastically.

And so it was settled. The vessel's course was altered to the south-eastward, and a good look-out was kept.

Towards evening a man announced land right ahead.

The captain and his lieutenant at once ascended the rigging, and swept the horizon in the direction indicated.

They at once made out a number of low-lying islands, with a lofty one in the middle, very prominent.

This was enough. Going below, the captain told Travers to have every sail furled, and bring the vessel to.

Not a light was to be burned where it might be visible from without.

Of course the orders were obeyed, though some of the men wondered what could be the motive of such peculiar conduct.

"There ain't no pirates about here that I ever heard of," said one, who thought himself very knowing.

"But," replied an old salt, "there used, years ago, to be a great hiding-place for slavers about here—them Arab dhows, I mean. They was never particular," he continued, in a low whisper, "who they took and sold."

"No?" cried his listeners, in surprise.

"It's as true as I'm alive," his comrade went on; "and if some of them gimcrack captains knew as much as I do, they might get a goodish bit of prize-money even now-a-days."

"Why do you not tell, then?" asked the other. "They'd be glad to know."

"Not I," said Bill Hatton, walking away. "It ain't no business of mine."

"Queer chap that," remarked one, when he was out of sight and hearing. "Expect he knows more than he cares to tell."

And others seemed to be very much of the same opinion.

The night was fine, but dark. By degrees the sea went down, and the frigate lay almost motionless.

At eight o'clock in the evening—in this latitude day and night are about equal—there sprang up a nice pleasant breeze.

The watches were relieved at that hour, and one half went below.

Bill Hatton was in the first lieutenant's watch. He was quite sixty years of age, very yellow and tanned, but active in the extreme.

As soon as the others had left the deck, he asked one of the middies if he might say two words to Lieutenant Travers.

That officer was surprised at the message; but knowing the sailor to be an old and experienced salt, he told him to come aft.

Hatton looked around, to see that no one was listening or able to hear.

"What I am going to say, sir, will be considered quite confidential like?" he said, touching his hat-brim timidly.

"Certainly, if it's anything worth hearing, my man," responded Lieutenant Travers.

"Do you see them three stars, sir?" he asked, pointing to the eastward and southward.

"Yes," replied the officer.

"That's the way they'll come," he went on.

"Who?" whispered the astonished lieutenant.

"The pirates, sir," the old man said. "The moment you stopped here, I knew you had a clue to the confounded rascals."

"But why did you not speak before?" continued Travers, in a low tone.

"Do you think people would believe the likes of me?" said Bill Hatton, bitterly. "I believe the villains have been at this work more 'an fifty years. But, sir, don't ask me any more. I've told you all I can."

Lieutenant Travers saw that the old sailor was much moved, and forbore to question him any more. That he knew a good deal about these pirates was evident; but to press him more closely could answer no good purpose.

At break of day they made a good offing, only returning to resume their post of observation when evening came again.

Lieutenant Travers had simply told the captain that Bill Hatton suspected their object, adding that he seemed fully convinced of the presence of evil-doers on those islands.

"The old man is reticent," said Travers; "but he appears thoroughly convinced of what he tells me."

"It will be a grand thing to extirpate such a nest of scoundrels," replied Arundel, gravely. "What heart-burnings and misery they must have caused in their time!"

Shortly afterwards the two officers separated, it being almost the hour to shift the watch.

At about half an hour before midnight

(eight bells), the look-out aloft came down, according to previous instructions, and reported a large vessel looming in the distance.

"All right, Simmons," said Lieutenant Travers. "Go up again, and keep your eyes open."

"Ay, ay, sir!" responded the man, touching his hat.

Scarcely had he retired when Bill Hatton approached, and touched his hat also.

"Well, my man, what is it now?" asked the lieutenant, good-naturedly.

The man pointed to the eastward.

"My eyes ain't so good as they was, sir," he said; "but if you will look through your night-glass, I think you will see something."

Lieutenant Travers at once acquiesced, and then gave a great start of surprise.

"Two dhows and some smaller boats," he said, in a low tone. "I will at once rouse the captain."

And going down, he soon awakened Captain Arundel, and made him acquainted with the discovery he had made.

Captain Arundel was soon on deck, and himself looking through the night-glass at the approaching foe.

"Pirates, by heavens!" he said, in a low tone. "And they are making for the large ship."

"The Admiralty were right, sir," remarked Travers. "There is a mist stealing up. We must be cautious."

"Yes," continued the captain, earnestly. "Rouse all the men, and put easy sail on her. The mist already almost conceals them. Besides, they have eyes only for their prey. We shall catch them."

His orders were at once obeyed. The bearings of both the larger vessel and the mysterious dhows and boats were taken, and the frigate was steered a middle course between the two.

All was silent as death on board the frigate. Not a light was visible from without.

She, however, glided slowly through the water.

Then once more they saw the suspicious boats and vessels at no great distance.

Now occurred a singular thing.

Doubtless deceived by the mist, which rendered the larger vessel wholly invisible for a time, the dhows and others made swiftly for the man-of-war.

Their decks were crowded by a dense mass of dark-looking men.

They came on with a low murmur of satisfaction and delight.

In an instant more the ports were open, the drum beat to quarters.

Then, with loud shouts, the now unmasked pirates came on with fierce glee.

A broadside was fired, and the wretches knew they had caught a Tartar.

Without firing a shot, they turned, with yells and groans, and made off.

Again the Fortune fired a volley, and then prepared to follow.

But the mist rolled up more thickly, and the baffled pirates were unfortunately lost to view.

At the same moment blue lights were seen at no great distance, which were repeated at rapid intervals.

"The Indiaman is anxious for an explanation, sir," remarked Travers.

"I suppose so," replied Captain Arundel. "Send up a light or two, and head directly for her."

The lieutenant obeyed, and soon the huge vessel loomed up close to them in the fog.

"What ship is that?" was roared through the speaking-trumpet from the man-of-war.

"The City of Glasgow, Indiaman, Captain Carstairs," was the loud response.

"What ship is that?"

"H.M. frigate Fortune, Captain Arundel," shouted Travers. "Lie to, and an officer will come on board."

The Indiaman obeyed, as a matter of course, and a boat being put out, the captain himself went in her to visit the strange ship.

He was received with due honours, and found not only the ship's officers awaiting him, but several of the male passengers, who had been startled by the firing of guns.

"Will you step into the saloon, Captain Arundel?" said the skipper, courteously.

Our hero consented, and was at once questioned by Carstairs as to what was the meaning of the guns they had heard.

"They were fired at a fleet of rascally pirates, who were coming to surprise your vessel."

"Pirates, sir!" said Captain Carstairs, incredulously; "in these seas?"

"Yes," replied Captain Arundel. "I have come out from England specially to protect three Indiamen at this spot—the Dublin Castle, the City of Glasgow, and the Red Chief. The Admiralty have positive information of pirates existing on the Achen Islands, which are protected by so many dangerous shoals."

The commander of the City of Glasgow and the passengers stared at the speaker incredulously.

Captain Arundel then explained what had passed, and the mistake the pirates had made in consequence of the mist.

"And have you seen nothing of the City of Dublin?" asked Carstairs, in a very grave tone of voice.

"Nothing," was his answer. "But she might have passed us in the storm."

"I am compelled by duty," continued the other, hesitatingly, "to tell you that among her passengers was a Mr. Charles Arundel, invalided home on leave of absence."

"My brother!" cried Henry Arundel, turning deadly pale. "I hope nothing has happened to him."

"Of course the Dublin Castle may have escaped both the perils of the deep and of these miscreants," said Captain Carstairs, feelingly; "still I thought I should mention it. Steward, wine."

"I deeply thank you," responded the younger brother. "I will remain by you until daylight, and then will make a minute search of the islands."

The other thanked him; and having partaken of some wine, returned to his ship, anxious and thoughtful.

That he had not sighted the Dublin Castle was, of course, not very wonderful, because though vessels follow, as it were, a beaten track on the ocean, they often diverge from it sufficiently to prevent them being seen by one coming the opposite way.

Still he was anxious in the extreme, and communicated his forebodings to his devoted friend Travers.

"But," said he, "of course she might have passed much farther out, and the storm was one to keep even pirates at home."

"Time will show," was the grave answer.

Until day broke they kept the Indianman in sight. Then Lieutenant Travers went on board with despatches for the Admiralty, and private letters from the officers and the men.

After this, she clapped on all sail, and with a loud cheer for the frigate's crew, continued her voyage, thankful to have escaped a danger fearful to contemplate.

When Arundel and Travers came on deck after breakfast, a midshipman approached, and saluting, called their attention to a lot of wreckage at no great distance, in the shape of large masts and spars, with sails attached.

Captain Arundel turned deadly pale, and caught Travers by the arm.

"Go and see what it is," he said, hoarsely. "I cannot."

His friend at once ordered a boat to be put out, and immediately rowed for the wreckage, which was floating away at the mercy of wind and waves.

He speedily returned.

"Well," asked the captain, "what is it?"

"The mizzen and mainmast of a large vessel," was the low-spoken reply. "The rigging has been cut away by axes, the ship being doubtless in terrible peril."

"It must be the Dublin Castle!" said Captain Arundel. "What is to be done? Shall we search for the hulk, and land on those accursed islands in search of the survivors?"

"Look!" cried Travers, pointing to where a column of smoke rose on high.

"Head for the land!" was the captain's reply; "and then come into the cabin with Hatton. The mystery must be solved!"

Travers obeyed; and bringing Hatton with him, he descended to the captain's cabin.

The old "salt" was reticent at first, but after solemn promises of reward, and of immunity if he had anything to reveal which might implicate himself, he owned that, though sorely against his will, he had in his young days been a member of the gang they were in search of. His escape had been a marvel, but all that was necessary to be known was that he could show them how to land on the island.

CHAPTER III.

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF THE DUBLIN CASTLE AND HER CREW.

A SHARP look-out was kept on board the Dublin Castle, which, being rather unmanageable, might at any moment run on a shoal or on rocks.

Daylight came at last, bright and clear, and then orders were given to erect jury masts, by the aid of which they might reach some port where they could refit completely.

Of course, the vessel was in a miserable plight, but thanks to the courage, skill, and discipline of the officers and crew, the lives of those on board were apparently safe.

The passengers had been fastened down under hatchways, and to add to the horrors of that terrible night, which none expected to survive, they had been for a long time in total darkness.

They had passed the hours huddled up like sheep in a pen. It was only when the ship righted that some of the gentlemen contrived to relight the lamps.

They revealed a group of ghastly faces. All knew that never had they been nearer death in their whole existence than during the preceding hours.

The steward and stewardess, who were

experienced hands, now hastened to make coffee, though the gentlemen first passed round wine to the ladies, and took brandy themselves.

Lucy had sat with her father's hand in hers through the whole terrible time.

Charles had been near to her, of course.

There was some weeping and much praying amongst the passengers, but no whining and shrieking.

As the coffee was being handed round, the saloon door was unlocked, and Captain Harcourt, in wild *déshabille*, entered.

"Thank goodness," he said, "the worst of the storm is over."

All fervently repeated his words.

"Still the storm is severe," the captain continued; "all who like can lie down, but I would advise them to keep on their clothes."

This was said airily enough, but it sent a thrill of horror through every frame. What new terror had they to fear?

The captain's demeanour was too grave, and his character too well known, for anyone to question him. But not one took advantage of his permission to lie down.

They seated themselves as best they might, on couches, sofas, and arm-chairs, and waited. Time went on, and the captain came in to breakfast, which was consumed as usual, though with but slight appetite.

"I have a communication to make of a startling, but not an alarming, nature," he said, calmly; "we must shortly leave the ship."

Everybody rose to their feet, as if under the influence of an electric shock.

"Be calm, ladies and gentlemen," he continued, quietly, "there's nothing to fear. Land is in sight. The men, as an addition to the boats, are making a raft. You have a full hour to prepare. Collect such of your valuables as are portable. The raft must be laden with provisions, as the land may be unproductive. Remember, we are in the line of all sailing vessels from India."

The passengers at once seated themselves. The words of the captain acted like an anodyne.

They were pale, but firm and resolute.

"All the gentlemen will arm themselves," he continued, "as these islands bear a bad name; but with our force we have nothing to fear."

And he left them, to return to his duties on deck.

This is what had happened.

The ship was so shaken by the furious storm, by the rolling and pitching, that about an hour before the captain entered

the saloon he bade the carpenter sound the well.

"Be cautious what you say," he whispered. "To my mind, she is leaking pretty freely; but don't startle the men."

The carpenter made the desired promise, and at once proceeded to obey orders.

He fetched a piece of rope-yarn, to which a weight was attached, and dropped it down the well.

When he pulled it up his face became of an ashen hue.

"Well?" the captain asked, in a low tone.

"Six feet of water in the hold," was his terrified reply.

"Hush!" was the stern command. "Maybe we shall have to take to the boats, but we'll do our duty first."

And he turned to the crew.

"My lads," he said, calmly, "the good ship has been overstrained in the storm, and when on her beam-ends must have taken in a great deal of water. We must rig the pumps. A stiff glass round, Mr. Temple!"

The men looked very blank, but the manner of the captain was cheery.

The rum was handed to all, and then the men, stripping, went to work, relieving each other at short intervals.

But the carpenter's report was unfavourable; the depth of water was increasing slowly but surely.

At last the captain made up his mind.

"I think, my lads," he said—he and the officers were armed now—"that we must give up all hope of saving the ship."

There was a general resumption of shirts and jackets, and an ominous murmur.

"Yonder is land," he went on, pointing in the direction of the peaks and strand. "There are plenty of boats; but as we shall require provisions, we must make a raft. The ship is good for many hours yet; so go to work quietly."

The manner of the captain was so calm that none seemed to doubt his words.

There was a cry or two from behind, however, that sounded mutinous.

"Let's take the boats," a man shouted, "and leave the passengers to the raft!"

All the officers drew their pistols.

"Children first, women next," said the captain, in an inflexible tone; "then passengers and crew; last, the skipper. The first man who mutinies dies."

There was no murmur after that, but the men went to work in an orderly way under their petty officers.

All the boats were sound, and a raft was easily made from parts of such a large ship, manned by a powerful crew.



THE DHOWS AND OTHERS MADE SWIFTLY FOR THE MAN-OF-WAR." (See p. 54.)

After breakfast another stiff glass of grog was given out, and at the end of another hour all was ready.

The passengers came forth completely dressed, and carrying with them as much of their valuables as could be saved. All their heavy luggage had to be abandoned.

The way in which the ship rolled was ominous.

The male passengers were all armed, while a large chest of weapons had been placed on the raft, which was to be towed by the boats.

The embarkation was effected successfully, and the men settled down to their work.

Several were on the raft with large oars, to help guide the unwieldy craft.

The sea, without being smooth, was not very boisterous.

They headed for the land. Their progress was necessarily very slow; but by degrees it became clearer and more distinct.

"Not much of a place to look at," said the captain; "but any port in a storm."

All heartily agreed with this observation.

A good look-out was kept for a landing-place, as all they could see of the shore was rocky and repulsive.

Presently, however, they were swept along by a current, and they found themselves carried into a small bay, where the land was low, and covered with trees and grass.

Here they determined to land.

All were glad to find themselves on shore. At all events, if they had to trust to the boats ultimately, they would have a rest.

The barrels of meat and other provisions were carried on shore, and rolled up to the shelter of the trees.

Tarpaulins and spare sails were then brought into requisition to make tents. One was erected first for the ladies, and another for the male passengers, after which the crew were provided for.

It was post-meridian by this time, and a cold collation was served.

For the making of tea, coffee, and such things, the steward had provided spirit-lamps and all requisites.

After the meal was over, the captain made a speech to all.

"Discipline must be maintained as much ashore as afloat," he said, "and one strict order must be obeyed—no gadding about. These islands were once the resort of Arab and other pirates and the secret haunt of slavers. I believe they are still peopled by a thievish and treacherous race, who would

cut us off in detail. There is plenty of exercise-ground here. Let us keep together, and we have nothing to fear."

The men promised to obey.

Captain Harcourt, however, took two of his steadiest men with him, and entering the wood was soon on the other side.

Before them was a rather arid plain of some extent, and beyond that another wood.

"You will remain here as sentries," said the captain. "Keep a good look-out; you shall be relieved every hour."

And he went away, returning to his passengers and crew.

The day passed off well. When night came, one watch went on duty, as on board ship, and relieved another.

There was, however, no disturbance of any kind; all was quiet.

The next day was about the same; but the night proved dark and gloomy.

A little before midnight the whole camp was startled by the firing of a broadside at no great distance.

"What can it mean?" cried Captain Harcourt, who, with all the passengers, had sat up to listen.

Then they went out into the open air, and had scarcely done so when they were again startled by the roar of another broadside.

"What can it mean?" asked Sir Ralph Merton; "it is incomprehensible."

"To me utterly so," said Captain Harcourt. "Can it be true that these islands really conceal pirates, and that they have had the audacity to attack an English ship of war?"

"It sounds very like it, sir," remarked his first officer.

"Well, it is too dark and misty to do anything to-night," said the captain; "but rely upon it, if it be so, the English officer in command will not go away without giving the insolent beggars a lesson."

"I should think so," replied Temple.

"Let all the men have arms," said the captain, "and double the sentries."

He was obeyed, and then all went to rest again, as no other firing was heard.

Shortly after breakfast the captain ordered a large fire of damp wood to be made, so as to send up a signal to any vessel which might be passing.

"But as it may bring hornets upon us as well," he added, "let everybody be ready."

An hour passed, and then one of the sentries came running in to announce the advance of a large body of armed men.

A small party was left to look after the women, and the rest advanced in the direction indicated by the alarmed sentry.

Passengers and crew were about ninety in number, tolerably well armed.

On reaching the skirts of the wood, to their great surprise they found a body, nearly double their number, composed for the most part of Arabs, Negroes, Kroomen, but with many of undoubted European origin amongst them.

The captain surveyed them with alarm.

"They are indeed pirates," he said, "and of the worst class. No wonder so many vessels have mysteriously disappeared. Away, Temple, and bring up the swivel gun out of the launch. We have but one resource—to fight. These wretches will show us no mercy. I will parley."

And he stepped forward. As he did so, and lifted his hand, the whole body halted, yelling and shouting.

One, however, advanced.

He was a stalwart man, of commanding mien, and great physical power.

He wore an Arab costume, with a turban, but he was undoubtedly a European.

Captain Harcourt knew several languages, but determined to try English first.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he asked.

"I am the master of this island," was the haughty reply; "and everything on it belongs to me. Surrender quietly, and your lives will be spared. Resist, and you die."

"We are a hundred well-armed Englishmen, and will defend our lives to the last!" said Captain Harcourt.

The man laughed, and waving his men to advance, they obeyed, and came rushing in, to be met, however, by such a withering fire as drove them back in disorder.

The chief, having led his men out of harm's way, held council. They had relied upon an easy victory.

After some consultation, they drew half to the right and half to the left, evidently bent on outflanking the foe.

Meanwhile Captain Harcourt, Sir Ralph, and one or two military men had consulted together.

It was determined to make a desperate stand for awhile, during which time the women were to be put on board the boats.

Then, after one tremendous volley, the survivors were to run and join them.

This was at once acted on, and sufficient force sent to carry out orders.

Meanwhile, the pirates, considerably reinforced, were collected in two columns.

The signal being given, they came on, at first slowly, and then with a rush.

The wrecked crew and passengers met them with a volley, both from their own guns and the swivel gun, which checked the

advance of the pirates considerably; after which they took to their heels, loading as they fled. But the worthless gang of renegades and outcasts and deserters dashed after them with the speed of deer-hounds, and before they could reach the boats they had to turn and defend themselves against more than double their number.

"Down on your knees, miserable infidels!" cried the leader, as the whole party faced them.

"Never!" replied Captain Harcourt. "Come on, and see how Englishmen can die! Push off the boats!" he shouted. "Away!"

With a yell, the savage pirates rushed in.

A desperate volley saluted them, to which, however, they made no response, for from behind came a ringing and terrible cry.

"Down with the villains! Old England for ever!"

The whole gang broke and fled.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT CAME OF IT.

As soon as the conference with Hatton was over, the Captain of the *Fortune* went on deck with the old sailor, who pointed out the direction which he was of opinion the ship should take.

It was on the opposite side of the island to that by which the raft and boats had landed.

The ship was carried in very carefully, Bill Hatton standing in the chains to guide the helmsman.

When the *Fortune* was about three-quarters of a mile from the shore, Hatton advised anchoring, and only taking the boats.

Every man who could be spared from the ship was drafted into the smaller craft.

When about half a mile from the shore, the sea became very "choppy," owing to the swell meeting from opposite directions round the island.

They sounded, and found seven fathoms and a half. As the cliffs sloped down here to the shore sufficiently to make it practicable to climb them, this spot was selected.

They all landed safely, and at once climbing the hills, descended into a plain, where locomotion was very difficult, owing to the rough nature of the ground and the length of the grass, which was several feet high.

Hatton acted as guide. Suddenly they stopped at a small hut, about seven feet high, eight feet long, and six feet wide,

built of strong poles driven into the ground.

It was deserted; but, from a miscellaneous collection of empty casks, wooden tubs, buckets, iron hoops, and the like, it appeared to have been the abode of some shipwrecked people.

While they were looking at this relic of the past, they were startled by the report of a rattling fire of musketry.

"On, my lads!" cried Captain Arundel; "there is work for us!"

And away they all went at a sharp pace, until, after crossing a small belt of wood, they saw clouds of smoke rising at no great distance. The firing was rapid, the assailants advancing in two columns.

Then they suddenly dashed off, evidently in pursuit of some foe.

On, on pressed the British tars, who soon thoroughly understood the meaning of the picture presented to their view.

The sight of the women crouching in the boats was enough for the gallant Fortunes.

On they sped, with a ringing shout, with what result we know.

The congratulations on both sides may be better imagined than described.

"Are these the passengers and crew of the Dublin Castle?" asked Captain Arundel.

"Yes," was the answer of its skipper.

"Where is my brother Charles?" cried the young officer.

"Here is all that is left of him, Harry," said the other, who was lying on the ground severely wounded. "I'm done for!"

And so they met. Harry was thunder-struck at the sight of his elder brother, who was pale from loss of blood.

The surgeon came up at once, and attended him with all the care he could.

"He must be removed on board your vessel at once," said he.

"Yes," cried Captain Arundel; "enough men will remain to take the ladies and invalids on board."

Then, at a sign (Bill Hatton placing himself at the head of the column), they started for the pirate stronghold, which was at the eastern end of the island, guarded by an intricate set of reefs, extending for miles, through which no ordinary pilot could have passed.

Brief as had been the space of time allowed, it had been enough for the terrified pirates, who were seen on board three dhows and several boats, escaping as fast as they could.

They were by this time beyond the reach of anything but the ship's guns. Before the Fortune could be brought round, they

would be out of sight, and reaching the distant mainland, would disperse up country.

All the English could do, after securing a good deal of valuable plunder, would be to go back to their vessel, and there discuss their future plans.

The Dublin Castle men returned to their boats, while the Fortune's returned to theirs.

Soon all were on board, but it was manifestly impossible that all could be properly accommodated.

Luckily at this juncture the Red Chief hove in sight, and was signalled to come close.

Captain Harcourt went on board, and startled his fellow-captain and friend by his wonderful narrative of the real existence of a pirate den among those islands, and its utter destruction.

It fortunately happened that the Red Chief had room for a large portion of the wrecked passengers and crew.

With this news Captain Harcourt returned on board the Fortune.

In the meantime a state-room had been given up to Charles Arundel, who was indeed very severely, if not dangerously, wounded.

Sir Ralph Morton expressed his deep regret at having to separate from his friend.

"You see, he will want a nurse, Captain Arundel, and my girl and he are old friends."

"I will find room for you, your daughter, and your servants," replied Captain Arundel.

"You want to overwhelm me with obligations," the judge remarked, warmly. "Where," he added, gravely, "should we all have been, but for you?"

"Tut, tut, Sir Ralph! I did but do my duty and obey orders," said our hero.

"All men do not obey orders, or do their duty," was the dry answer.

It was therefore arranged that Sir Ralph Morton, his man, Lucy, and her maid, should remain with Charles Arundel in the Fortune.

Captain Harcourt offered to ship even as a sailor, to get home to see his owners; but the midshipmen found him a berth.

The rest were transferred to the Red Chief.

The Fortune now cracked on all sail for England, the captain happy in having carried out his mission.

Charles had every comfort. The surgeon of the frigate was a very experienced practitioner.

Then the young man had two excellent nurses in Lucy and his brother Henry.

The latter was thrown very much into the society of the young lady, whom he thought the most charming and beautiful girl he had ever seen.

But he never gave her any hint to that effect.

It was clear to him that his brother loved her dearly, with what hope of return he could not say.

At all events, he thought, a young man like himself, with nothing whatever but his profession to depend on, must not look upon so fair a vision with much hope.

Lucy was most kind to him, while the old judge was never weary of singing his praises.

They made a rapid voyage to England, and never was Admiral more astonished than to see the number of the *Fortune* hoisted.

Captain Arundel went ashore with his own despatches.

"Well, what has brought you back?" asked Sir William, shaking him by the hand.

"Found out the pirates' den, and utterly destroyed it," said Henry Arundel, with a smile.

"Bless my soul!" was the answer. "You take my breath away. Tell me all about it. First, a short telegram."

It was sent, and the despatches forwarded by special courier to the Admiralty Office.

Henry told his story, to which the Admiral listened with delighted astonishment.

Next day all England rang with the exploits of Captain Arundel, for Harcourt described them vividly in his account of the wreck.

Luckily, the hull of the Dublin Castle went ashore, and was sighted by the Red Chief.

Charles Arundel and party were taken to the best hotel in the place, and a phy-

sician was sent for from London. He gave no hope whatever.

He might linger a week or two, and then all would be over. Charles did not care much, for he had proposed to Lucy, and been kindly rejected.

But she remained with him to the last, and he died holding her hand in his.

"I have bought a place in Hampshire," said Sir Ralph to Harry, when the funeral was over. "Shall be most happy to see you at Christmas."

Harry resolved to go.

He had been loyal to his brother, living. Now he was free.

When he went down to Morton House, it was as sole heir to the baronetcy.

His last cousin was dead, and his uncle was, the doctors declared, a hopeless invalid.

Still Henry was loth to speak, until he found that Captain Spencer was doing his best to win Lucy.

"It seems unkind to say what I am going to say," he whispered, when they were alone one day; "but I am appointed to the command of the *Europa*, which is to escort the Governor-General of Canada to his post. I shall be away four months. No one knows what may happen in that time."

"Well," she said, timidly, "in what way can I assist you out of your difficulties?"

"Lucy, I love you," he answered, "and would secure you as my wife before I go. I love you. When I first knew you I loved you, but I was then a poor naval officer. All is changed now. Will you say yes?"

"Yes," was her blushing answer; "and I would have said so then if you had asked me."

Well, after that, we will say no more, except that on Henry's return he was married, and is on the retired list, ready to return to duty whenever his country requires his services.

A GHOST IN THE WITNESS-BOX.

BY CHARLES H. ROSS.

PART I.

THE MARRYING MAN.

JUST a little over half a century ago the following advertisement appeared in one of the London newspapers:—

"A private gentleman, aged twenty-four, entirely independent, whose disposition is not to be exceeded (*sic*), has lately lost the chief of his family by the hand of Providence, which has occasioned amongst the remainder circumstances the most disagreeable to relate. To any female of respectability, who would study for domestic comfort, and who is willing to confide her future happiness to one in every way qualified to render the marriage state desirable, as the advertiser is in affluence. Many happy marriages have taken place through the means now resorted to. It is hoped none will answer through impertinent curiosity; but should this meet the eye of any agreeable lady who feels desirous of meeting with a sociable, tender, kind, and sympathizing companion, she will find this advertisement worthy of notice. Honour and secrecy may be depended on. As some little security against idle application, it is requested that letters may be addressed (post paid), 'A. Z., care of Mr. Foster, stationer, 68, Leadenhall Street,' with *real* name and address, which will meet with most respectful attention."

Possibly a mere male creature might have had his suspicions of the good faith of the author of this rigmorole—might, perhaps, have doubted whether this gathering together of vulgar and clumsy sentences could have come from the pen of an honest, wealthy gentleman; but it was to women the advertiser addressed himself,

and they responded with profusion. Forty-five answers reached the worthy stationer's shop, several of them being personally delivered by ladies who actually seem to have gone for that purpose in their own carriages.

In one of these answers it was requested that "A. Z." should attend a particular church, on an appointed day, dressed in a particular fashion, and it was promised that he there should meet a fair stranger, wearing a certain dress, and that (both understanding what they came about) no further introduction would be necessary. To guard against mistake, "A. Z." was also to wear his left arm in a sling; and in case he did not observe her she would discover him and introduce herself. Unfortunately for "A. Z.," but fortunately for the lady, he occupied so long a time in adorning himself for the conquest that when he got to the church the congregation had departed. Subsequent inquiries of the pew-opener led to the discovery that she came in her own carriage, and was a young woman of fortune. By this time, however, "A. Z." was otherwise matrimonially disposed of.

In the fifteenth century there was a convent on the site of Sion House, at Brentford, which is said to have had an aqueous tunnel under the river, terminating at Kew, which, according to scandalmongers of those times, is alleged to have enabled the monks on the other side of the water to pay visits to the Convent of St. Bridget. In 1828 stood, and possibly stands there still, a certain Grove House, in Ealing Lane, where was once carried on a "select academy for young ladies," and it was, in truth, its mistress who, among others answering the advertisement, won that inestimable prize, "A. Z."

Oddly enough, they were not entire

strangers, having been introduced to one another some months before at the seaside, and now by appointment, and much surprised at the *rencontre*, they met again at a pastrycook's in Fleet Street.

No unnecessary time was wasted in courtship. "A. Z." doubtless made a few inquiries—she none; and in one short week they were married. That they were happy who can doubt?

Apparently, he had always a few loose guineas in his pockets; and as the school was highly successful, she had no immediate necessity to call upon him for funds—indeed, she was herself independent. Thus, then, did five months of their married life pass tranquilly away, until one morning a thick-set, rather common-place man, with mutton-chop whiskers and top boots attracted the attention of the young ladies at their studies in the school-room, as he walked very deliberately up the garden path, previous to rat-tat-tatting desperately with the knocker.

"Is your master in?" he inquired of the trim housemaid.

"Ye-es, sir," she replied, doubtfully; "but he is engaged. What name shall I say?"

"Lea," replied the visitor, affably. "It is with respect to placing a young lady—my daughter—here at school."

"It is the missus, then, you wish to see," said the girl, running her eyes over the man's somewhat rough exterior.

"The master, *if you please*," said the man, with a slight emphasis.

"I will take your name in," she said, "but master and missus are at breakfast," and with these words she tripped up the passage, leaving the top boots standing on the mat in front of the open door.

The moment her back was turned, the owner of the boots in question twisted round his head and beckoned to another pair of top boots crunching the gravel on the path outside the gate, and then briskly followed upon the heels of the retreating maid.

It was a charming scene of felicitous domesticity that top boots No. 1 intruded his presence upon. Four charming ladies, the mistress of the establishment, and three of her favoured assistants sat round the breakfast-table, whilst the master, in a flowered dressing-gown of extreme beauty, watch in hand, was minuting the boiling of the breakfast eggs. Alas! those eggs boiled very hard indeed before they were taken off.

At the sight of the booted man peeping over the housemaid's shoulder the master of the house stood transfixed with surprise, and in lamb-like fashion obeyed the visitor's

request that he would step out into the passage and speak to him. What the latter had to say neither the maid at the door nor the ladies in the room could hear, but the egg-boiler appeared to be extremely astonished, and turned alternately red and white. Two things only were audible.

"Can I put on my coat?"

"If you come quietly I needn't put on the handcuffs."

By this time top boots No. 2 had entered the house and closed the door behind him, and the four ladies and the servant-girl were thoroughly alarmed. It appeared then that the two top-bootses were police-officers from Lambeth, and that they had come to apprehend the dressing-gown "on a charge," said top boots No. 1, "from which, no doubt, the gentleman will easily clear himself."

"Of course," cried the gentleman, with a somewhat forced laugh. "Why, I never heard of the woman in all my life!"

The two pair of tops refused, with the dressing-gown's concurrence, to give any further particulars at the time, and he having assured the newly-married wife that it would be "all right," and that he would be back to dinner, the husband was carried off in a hackney coach, nodding pleasantly out of window.

But before taking their departure one of the tops had searched the prisoner's bedroom and study, and made a parcel of a brace of pistols, a powder-flask, some bullets in a velvet bag, and a sharp-pointed dagger, and, strange to say, that newly-married man did *not* come back to dinner.

PART II.

THE MAN WHO WOULD NOT MARRY.

IN eighteen hundred and twenty-eight, an insignificant little village (Polstead) in the county of Suffolk became suddenly notorious. Whether or not there be such a place now I have no notion; but, at any rate, it is not to be found in any map or gazetteer or itinerary of roads in my possession. Two years before the date mentioned the pretty daughter of a certain mole-catcher resided there, and had, by her light conduct, created no small scandal. Miss Maria's face and figure had, indeed, been her ruin, and in the end, instead of landing her comfortably in some snug farmhouse, with some worthy farmer for a husband, led to her disgrace and violent death. I am not quite sure that the story of her early life is of so delectable a character that I need here repeat it; on the contrary, for it was an oft-told tale, the sad details of which



"THE FORM OF THE MURDERER HAD BEEN DISTINCTLY VISIBLE TO HER." (See p. 67.)

are as old as the hills, and yet will form the groundwork of a score of such life-dramas to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow. Ah! whisk aside your skirts from such contamination, good madam, and let her pass by! May no temptation ever cross your path to lead you astray! Go home to your good husband, and your good children, your good servants, good dinners, good income, daily duties, rules, regulations, and family prayers. Go home and be happy!

In the verbatim account of the trial of this village beauty's cold-blooded assassin, I find it stated by the counsel for the prosecution "that an unfortunate step ruined the character of the young woman," and there are also records of a "second mishap with a gentleman of fortune residing in the neighbourhood," and "a third *liaison* with the man who became her deliberate murderer."

This third man alluded to was the son of a rich farmer in Polstead, then dead, but whose widow carried on the farm. With him the molecatcher's pretty daughter fell really in love, and the dream of her life was that he would marry her. It is uncertain whether or not he himself had any such intention, but he made belief that he had, and was only anxious that during his mother's lifetime, or until he could manage to obtain her consent, it should be kept a secret. To this end elaborate precautions were taken. They were to be married by license instead of by banns, and she must disguise herself in a suit of his clothes, and meet him in the evening in a barn on the outskirts of the farm, where she could exchange them for her own, he promising that he would have a gig in readiness, in which they would, without delay, travel together to Ipswich.

It was surely a strange proposition; but the girl readily agreed to it, as did, after some hesitation, her mother; and Maria's future husband strolled away, to be met presently by Maria's brother carrying a pickaxe, an odd thing to be doing just at that moment, it was afterwards agreed. But of the unfortunate girl herself nothing was ever afterwards seen or heard during her life except certain messages which the young man who had taken her away delivered. Her return had been looked forward to by the mother within a day or two of the time of her departure; but as she had ever been extremely erratic and irregular in the duration of her outings, and as, besides, there had been some kind of understanding that her husband was to take a lodging for her for a while at Ipswich, nothing much was thought of her lengthened absence. Yet it was somewhat

odd that he himself was still, day after day, seen hanging about the village. In about a fortnight, however, the mother began to question him closely, and then he stated that he had removed his young wife secretly to a place at some distance, to avoid the discovery of the marriage by his family; and so the weeks rolled on from the month of May, when Maria left Polstead, until the harvest had been got in, and the barn, the scene of her fanciful masquerading, had been stocked with golden-hued grain. Then, having in September got through his autumn's work, and feeling, he said, in ill-health, he left Suffolk, with the avowed intention of proceeding to the Continent, taking with him about four hundred pounds.

From this time several letters were received, not only by the girl's family, but by his own mother, in which he stated that he was living with Maria in the Isle of Wight, although again, oddly enough, the letters all bore the London post-mark, and no other. And still the weeks passed slowly away, whilst the father and mother of the girl grew more and more uneasy, until, six months later, an extraordinary event occurred, which but too soon led to the discovery of an atrocious crime.

Three nights running the mother, awakened in terror, clutched her husband by the shoulder, and trembling and gasping for breath, explained as well as she was able that she had had a horrible dream; that she had seen her daughter's ghost; that her daughter had been decoyed and brutally murdered; that the form of the murderer had been distinctly visible to her, and that it was the man who had taken her away! Nor was this all. The barn where the crime was committed, and the interior of which she had never set eyes on, was distinctly revealed to her in the vision, and a corner indicated where the remains of the murdered girl would be found.

The father listened to the story in amazement, and, passionately implored by the distracted mother to visit the barn and make a search, reluctantly complied, and obtained permission to examine the interior, from which the grain had by this time been removed. Easily enough he recognised the spot the mother had described, and he set to work. In but a few minutes he came upon a piece of a shawl, which he knew to be his daughter's, and at no greater depth than eighteen inches, discovered a portion of a human body. Horror-stricken, he rushed screaming from the spot, the whole neighbourhood was aroused, and a hue and cry for the murderer began.

PART III.

THE HANGED MAN.

"But how," asked Mr. Chigwell, the solicitor, "are we to get the ghost into the witness-box?"

Possibly some instances may be on record, and certainly, in the good old witch-tor-turing times, spirits frequently appeared in court to the worthy Hopkins and his trusty followers, though whether they kissed the book before giving evidence I can't say for certain.

In this case it was with the very greatest difficulty that they managed to keep the dream-ghost as much as possible in the background, though it was impossible to get on without some allusion to it. The trial took place at the Shire Hall, Bury St. Edmunds. The crowd collected outside at five in the morning, and remained, in spite of the pouring rain, until nine, when the judge arrived. An eye-witness spoke of the scene inside the court as "beggaring description." The counsel for the prosecution and the defence in vain struggled against the pressure of the mob, and were seen fighting for half an hour in the far distance. The sheriff's force was so ineffectual that they could not make room for the jury, who eventually were carried over the heads of the crowd, some with their coats torn, others shoeless and nearly fainting.

Amidst groans and execrations, the prisoner was brought from the gaol. Called upon for his defence, he read from a manuscript, prepared for him by his lawyer, an ingenious though impossible story, by which he sought to prove that Maria had

secretly obtained possession of one of his pistols, and shot herself; but there was a damning stab, which he could only account for by saying that it must have been done by the teeth of the molecatcher's rake.

The judge summed up, and a verdict of "Guilty" was returned. Then he broke down, and was dreadfully agitated.

To the last, however, his wife, the lady who kept the school, believed in his innocence; and in their leave-taking, which is described as heartrending, the condemned man implored her, should she marry again, "to be cautious how she accepted a proposition reaching her through the equivocal medium of an advertisement."

Had he been really innocent, this would seem like an unnecessary reflection upon himself; but next day he confessed his crime.

About seven thousand persons came to see the execution, most of them women. The body afterwards was exposed on a table in the centre of the Shire Hall, partly dissected, and presenting a horrible spectacle, and crowds flocked in to see it. The rope used by the hangman fetched a guinea an inch. Large sums were offered for the pistols and dagger, and the velvet bag which was proved to have belonged to the girl. A piece of the murderer's skin, carefully tanned, was exhibited for a long time afterwards at the shop of a leather-seller in Oxford Street, at which, as a boy, I remember gazing upon in silent awe.

And this is some account of the murder at the Red Barn, and of Maria Martin and William Corder, the "sociable, tender, kind, and sympathizing" young man who advertised for a wife.

LORD SEVERNOAK'S DAUGHTER.

BY M. H. H

THERE was no doubt about it—Lord Severnoak was ruined. It is a common story enough—a confiding employer and a rascally agent. For many years Mr. Cloverly had all the management of Lord Severnoak's vast estates, and during that time he persistently threw dust in the too-confiding lord's eyes. Being allowed to do just what he liked, he feathered his own nest sufficiently, and then removed it, feathers and all, to the land where most rogues and vagabonds shelter themselves from the avenging arm of justice. Mr. Cloverly set up a princely establishment in one of the most fashionable localities in New York, and flourished as we frequently see the wicked flourish in this paradoxical world of ours.

There were plenty found to say that it served Lord Severnoak right—that he should have looked after his own affairs better; and these, be it remarked, were his most intimate friends, who ought to have known that Lord Severnoak was too high-minded and honourable himself to suspect his agent, and as Mr. Cloverly was a great deal cleverer than his employer, let us say, without entering into details, the riches changed hands and the ruin came.

The swindler was scarcely at the other side of the "herring-pond" when the creditors, in hungry packs, came down upon the unfortunate nobleman; and before he could realize the extent of his misfortune he found himself stripped of everything, and, with his only daughter, very glad indeed to accept the shelter of a small house, originally tenanted by a steward, and which the creditors offered him as a temporary abode until the property should be sold and the purchaser should take possession.

So Lord Severnoak and his daughter

Cecil came down from their high estate and hid themselves from the world.

Good Mary Shadwell, Cecil's faithful old governess and companion, refused to leave them. She was a distant cousin of the Courtneys, and had saved money in their service—a considerable sum—which, to her, came in very handily at this period.

She secretly furnished the little house from cellar to attic, and reaped a rich reward from the father's and daughter's looks of astonishment and pleasure as the various articles of comfort, and even luxury, met their eyes.

When Cecil was a baby, her godmother left her two hundred a-year, a bequest which Lord Severnoak, at the time, good-naturedly smiled at, but which now, by an unexpected revolution of the wheel, was all they had to depend upon.

There were great sales at the Castle; old plate, old china, splendid furniture, and the contents of the picture-gallery, which was at once the pride and boast of the county. The brokers, agents, and such gentry gathered, like vultures around carrion, intent upon bargains; such a sale comes but once in a century, and the aforesaid gentry spent two or three days of the most unalloyed pleasure, departing well satisfied when all was over; and the grand old Castle was left dismantled and forlorn, to be tenanted only by rats and spiders.

No purchaser had as yet been found for the estates when, some fifteen months later, Lord Severnoak sat alone in the little room called by courtesy his library.

He was a noble-looking old man, with hair white as snow, and his face seamed and wrinkled with many lines of care.

He had been reading, but the book now lay upon his knee, with one finger between the leaves. His eyes were fixed upon the

carpet, and ever and anon he shook his silvered locks.

His melancholy meditations were interrupted by the opening of the door, and Cecil entered.

She held an open note in her hand, but did not at once allude to its contents. She came behind her father's chair, and passing her arm round his neck, kissed his forehead.

"Reading, papa, darling? How do you like the book I left for you?"

It was impossible to resist the influence of her fresh young voice, and Lord Severnoak smiled as he replied—

"It is fairly well written; but the story is too strange to be true."

"Not at all; facts are stranger than fiction," she began, but suddenly stopped, as she remembered their own story.

Cecil Courtayne was not startlingly beautiful—not one of those ideal creatures we sometimes read about; but she was very lovely, nevertheless. The expression of her brown eyes alone would have made her face handsome; add to this, masses of golden-brown hair, a clear, healthy pallor, small, finely-chiselled features, and the picture is complete.

But far beyond her beauty, a noble soul dwelt within her, and a true heart beat beneath her bosom. Her character was firm and steadfast, and in their adversity she it was who cheered and sustained her father.

Her love for him was a passion. Regardless of her own sufferings, she took the burden of life upon her slender shoulders, and carefully shielded her afflicted parent from the cares and annoyances of a position so novel to him.

Two noble women indeed they were—the old governess and the young and high-born girl—working hand in hand together, cheering and comforting one another, and each taking her own part in the round of daily duties, so new to the one, and almost forgotten by the other; both straining every nerve in the effort to sweeten adversity and make life bearable to the aged man whom they loved so well. Truly did the great bard sweetly sing,

"When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou."

In all ages have great men paid their tribute of praise to women, and never do they show their own superiority more than by doing so.

Cecil kept behind her father's chair, and fidgetted with the paper in her hand.

"Our own story, Cecil—were you think-

ing of it? Could anything be more strange and true?"

"Yes, dear," she answered, softly. "Papa, I have something to say to you. Mr. Grimes told you some time ago that they soon expected to get a purchaser for the estates. They are sold."

The old man did not answer, but he bowed his head upon his breast.

"They have been sold for some time," continued Cecil, coming round and kneeling before him.

"And you never told me," he returned, reproachfully.

"I would not tell you now, dear, but that I must, and Mary Shadwell would not. There is a matter of business connected with it."

"Who is the purchaser?" he inquired, after a pause.

"A Mr. Webster."

"Cotton or tallow?" groaned the nobleman. "I *know* he is a cotton merchant."

"No, papa; I think not. Iron, I believe."

"An ironmonger living at Severnoak Castle! Oh, Cecil, I cannot bear it! I would I were not here to witness such degradation!"

"Do not say that, papa, darling. What is it to us who lives at the Castle? We are all in all to each other, and as long as we are left together, it does not matter much what happens. We are very comfortable, are we not?—and dear Mary Shadwell is the best of good managers."

"I suppose we must now leave this retreat, humble as it is. The man will want it for his steward."

"That is the very thing I came to speak to you about. See, this is a note from Mr. Webster."

"Indeed! has he already given us notice to quit? I suppose he is anxious to get rid of us as soon as possible."

"Dearest father, I never knew you to be unjust before; but you do not know. You seemed to like this house so well—we are all so fond of it—that I wrote to Mr. Webster, begging he would allow us to rent it; here is his answer."

She held out the note, but he waved it away with a trembling hand.

"Read it for me—read it for me, Cecil; my eyes are failing. Of course, he refuses. These upstarts are so proud of their power."

Cecil read:—

"DEAR MADAM,—

"Your favour to hand. I will do myself the honour of calling upon you to-morrow,

the twenty-fifth instant, at half-past six p.m.

"Your obedient servant,

"JOHN WEBSTER.

"Severnoak Castle, 24th July, 18—."

"Business, like! But I wish he would spare us the infliction of a visit."

"You need not see him, dear; Mary Shadwell and I can arrange matters. You know she is an excellent woman of business."

"But I will see him," said Lord Severnoak, pettishly. "I will not be put aside, like a piece of useless lumber. And, besides," he continued, bitterly, "I should like to meet the man who takes my place by virtue of wealth—a place I have lost by my folly and credulity."

"Very well, papa," she answered, soothingly, turning away to conceal the tears that started to her eyes—tears that a little later were shed in full force upon the bosom of her faithful friend.

Cecil never wept over her own misfortunes and ruined prospects, but the thought of her father's unhappiness convulsed her slight frame with sobs.

"Oh, Mary—dear Mary Shadwell, what shall I do? It breaks my heart to see him so sad and desponding. What can I do for my father?" she moaned.

"Patience, my dear one; patience."

"I do not care about myself, and I do not call our losses affliction so long as we are all left together; but, oh, Mary! I would do anything—anything to restore my father to his former position!"

"That would be an impossibility, Cecil. We have done with the past, and the future is a sealed book to us. What we have to think of now is whether Mr. Webster will allow us to keep this house or not."

"Dear Mary, I fear there is another trial in store for me. I had a letter from Wilfred this morning, and he purposes coming down by to-morrow's early train. I cannot allow him to meet papa; he says such hard and unjust things of him."

"The morning's train, hem; that will bring him here about half-past ten, and your father never leaves his room until twelve. You will have ample time to speak to him, and I can easily arrange matters so that you can see him alone."

"But it seems so strange not to have Wilfred stay with us."

"Everything seems strange to us now, Cecil." Then she asked, abruptly, "Do you love your cousin very much?"

The girl's pale face flushed, and she replied, without hesitation, "Of course I do."

"Do you love him as a girl should her

future husband? For instance, better than your father?"

"Certainly not. I love papa better than anyone in the whole world. Why do you ask?"

"Because I have a presentiment that your love will soon be put to the test. I do not like the tone of your cousin's letters; and in my opinion, the sooner you two come to an understanding the better it will be for both."

"Congratulate me, Cecil. My picture is sold, and I am on the high road to fortune."

"Oh, Wilfred, how glorious! When was it sold, and to whom?"

"Last week; a famous connoisseur bought it. It sold for two hundred guineas, no trifling sum, I can assure you, for a first attempt."

Wilfred was Lord Severnoak's nephew, and heir to his title; and he considered that no one had been half so much wronged as himself by the wreck of that nobleman's fortune.

He was a young man of splendid abilities, but of a selfish and self-sufficient character. He was engaged to his cousin Cecil since the days of their childhood—an arrangement which had been made by their fathers with a view to uniting the title and estates; and when the young people were old enough to understand, they did not object, and so it was ratified.

Wilfred's fortune as the son of a younger brother was very fair, and he chose the art of painting as a profession.

"I am so glad to hear of your good fortune!" cried Cecil. "I suppose you are now certain of success?"

"Yes, certain," he answered, tossing back the hair from his forehead. "What I came down principally for to-day was to tell you that you shall share my fortune. What has happened will make no difference in the relations between us."

In saying this, Wilfred considered he was sacrificing himself for the sake of honour, and being prepared for a burst of gratitude on Cecil's part, was rather astonished at her total silence.

"Do you understand?" he went on, a little impatiently. "I shall remove you from this miserable abode, in which it is impossible you can support existence. I am in a position to marry at once, Cecil. With your two hundred a-year added to my income and prospects, we will get on capitally. I shall take a villa on the Thames, with a large room for painting, and very soon I will be at the top of the tree."

"We must not think of marrying yet," answered his cousin, quietly. "Papa has scarcely become reconciled to his new mode of life. He is very feeble, and any change, even a change for the better, would not do for him at present."

A very unbecoming frown darkened Wilfred's brow, and he answered petulantly, "I do not see how that can prevent our getting married. You do not suppose for a moment that he is going to live with us?"

A bright spot of colour stained Cecil's cheek, but she inquired calmly, "And may I ask what you propose doing with him?"

"Oh, I suppose we must allow him something," he returned, grumblingly, "or provide an asylum for him. He ought to be content with very little."

"An asylum for my father?"

Wilfred did not heed the warning conveyed by her calm manner, and he answered, "Yes. After ruining us all, and disgracing himself, he ought to be only too glad to get anything."

Cecil's eyes flashed fire, and rising, she drew herself up to her full height.

"My father has *not* disgraced himself. It was his misfortune to be ruined by the villany of another. He is to be pitied for his downfall, and not reproached."

"Oh, come, Cecil; it's no use going into heroics! You know very well that he has destroyed all our prospects by his culpable carelessness and credulity. Look at me. What is the use of being Lord Severnoak, with a paltry few hundreds a-year? What business had he," he continued, his voice rising with his passion—"what business had he to trust an agent so implicitly? I always considered him a fool, but—"

"How dare you speak so of my father! You shall not insult him under his own roof, humble as it is. You will have to wait until he is dead to call yourself Lord Severnoak; and if I had refused to marry you, you would be in exactly the same position you are now."

"Perhaps I have spoken a little too harshly; but you must allow it is very hard to have one's prospects ruined by another's foolishness."

"You are to be pitied!" she returned, scornfully. "Is it manly to whine over the loss of money and lands? You are young and strong—successful in your profession. Go and make a position for yourself. As for me, I was never so happy in my life as I am in this small house. My only regret is that I am not a man, so that I could work for my beloved father."

"You were always rather democratic in your ideas," he said, with a half-sneer.

"If it is democratic to admire energy and perseverance, I certainly am. To me the man who 'wins gold and wears it' is Nature's true nobleman, not the one who becomes so by a mere accident of birth."

"I must confess I prefer being one by the accident of birth, and decidedly I would not work if I could help it," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "But we are wandering far from the subject of our conversation. When will you be ready to marry me, Cecil?"

"When will *you* be ready to receive my father, and act the part of a son towards him?"

"Never! You will have to choose between us."

"I have chosen. I will never desert my father as long as he lives, and I beg that you will leave the house at once and for ever! Papa will be down soon, and must not be disturbed by your presence;" and, with a gesture of dismissal, she left the room.

When she reached her own apartment, her excited feelings gave way. The scene she had gone through was too much for her, and throwing herself upon her bed, she shed many and bitter tears.

Mary Shadwell found her thus, when, after knocking, she entered.

"Crying again, Cecil? This will never do. My brave, strong girl is becoming discouraged."

"No, Mary; I am like a child, weeping over a broken bubble. I had a bright dream; but, like all dreams, it has vanished."

"You are not the only woman who has dreamed, child;" and Mary Shadwell asked her no questions.

Punctually at half-past six, Mr. Webster knocked at the door of the steward's house, and sent in his card by the tidy servant, who ushered him into the drawing-room. It was simply but elegantly furnished, and the air of refinement pervading the whole apartment could not fail to strike the beholder.

Lord Severnoak was *not* present, and Cecil rose gracefully to receive their visitor.

John Webster was by no means an awkward man—quite the contrary, and he was accustomed to good society; therefore his palpable start when he first beheld Lord Severnoak's daughter, and his subsequent embarrassment as she introduced Miss Shadwell and politely invited him to be seated, was unaccountable.

Mary Shadwell addressed him at once. "Before sending for Lord Severnoak, will you be good enough to settle what you have so kindly called about. He naturally dislikes any kind of business connected with the estate."

Mr. Webster bowed, and answered, "I am happy to have it in my power to oblige his lordship. As I am my own steward, this house would lie idle on my hands; so if Miss Courtayne and Lord Severnoak will honour me by keeping possession of it as long as it suits them, they will confer a real favour upon me."

"We are quite willing—quite able to rent it, if you will kindly allow us to do so," put in Cecil, in her soft, plaintive voice. "We are very independent people," she continued, with a charming smile, although her sensitive lips were quivering.

Mr. Webster's keen perception showed him what would be the right course to pursue; so bowing again, he answered, "It shall be as you wish;" and at this moment her father entered.

Lord Severnoak had quite made up his mind to find in John Webster a business man, who would be perhaps a little awkward in society to which he was unaccustomed. There was therefore a dash of patronage in the courtesy with which he extended his hand to his visitor. He did not all at once find out that John Webster's deference was for age and misfortune, not for title or high birth. Had Lord Severnoak retained his exalted position he would not perhaps have found the "ironmonger" quite so respectful. As it was, his deference flattered the old man's pride, and it never occurred to him that the man of business was a millionaire and he himself a beggar.

He *did* discover that his new acquaintance was an intellectual, well-informed gentleman—one who had travelled a good deal—and that his conversation was very pleasing.

Although conversing with the father, Mr. Webster did not lose a single word or look of the daughter's.

He was forty-five years old, and his hair was beginning to turn gray. For twenty of those years he had been hard at work making money. He had never in the course of his life given a thought to a woman; but it was fated that at his mature age he was to fall in love as suddenly and helplessly as a boy of seventeen. The indifferent glances of a pair of brown eyes caused his heart to flutter, and the tones of a low, sweet voice lingered in his ears like the soft sigh of a summer wind.

It was a case of love at first sight.

Cecil was not by any means looking her best. She was paler than usual, and there was a heaviness about her eyes that betokened weariness; nevertheless, John Webster completely lost his head over her beauty.

She smiled upon him, for her father seemed pleased with his conversation, and the infatuated man lingered so long that, tea being brought in, he was invited to share the modest meal, an invitation which he accepted with manifest delight.

How quickly he was taken possession of by the malicious urchin! The tea was nectar, the bread and butter ambrosia, and the young girl who handed him his cup the very goddess of love and beauty!

When he rose at last to go, Lord Severnoak pressed him to renew his visit, and he was only too happy to give a willing assent.

"You are fond of flowers, Miss Courtayne?" he asked, stopping before a bowl of lovely roses.

"Oh, yes, passionately. But I do not care for cut blossoms. I love to see them growing and nestling among their green leaves."

"My gardens are at your service, if you and Miss Shadwell care to—care to—"

He hesitated, remembering that *his* gardens had been her's not very long ago.

"Thank you," she said, gently. "It will give us great pleasure to visit them now and then."

Cecil's small white hand touched his for a second at parting, and the touch sent a thrill through his heart and lingered in his thoughts as he walked home through the park.

Love, although new-born, was no weak sentiment in his case, requiring to be nourished and cherished to maturity. It came all at once, strong and full grown, almost overwhelming him with its force and intensity.

"And she is as far above me as yonder star," he said, pausing to lift his hat from his brow, "as unapproachable as the sun. What madness is this? As if she would bestow a thought upon me! With my gray hairs, too!" he continued, bitterly. "Oh, I must not see her again!"

"The most gentlemanly man I have met this long time," affirmed Lord Severnoak, as the door closed upon their landlord.

"Notwithstanding his being an ironmonger," said Cecil, slyly, for she was in high spirits at seeing her father so pleased.

"He is not an ironmonger, child. Grimes called here this afternoon and told me all about him. His father was a great contractor, and left him a colossal fortune. It

is apparent to us all that Mr. Webster is well educated and intelligent. Class prejudices are, I regret to say, fast dying out, and this man, with his wealth and education, can command any position he likes, although, I must say, I do not myself approve of mixing the classes."

"I suppose his wife and daughters will sail upon us?" said Cecil, speculatively.

"You will not be troubled in that way, for he is not married."

"Not married!" exclaimed Cecil, opening her lovely eyes. "Such an old man!"

"Really, Cecil, you are very silly. Mr. Webster is in the prime of life—quite young, in fact," said Lord Severnoak, irritably.

"Very well, papa, dear; he is quite a boy, if you wish, and very much nicer than the general run of boys. What do you think of him, Mary? You have not given an opinion."

"When I see him again, I will form one. You know I am slow in making up my mind about people."

"Cautious Mary Shadwell! Nevertheless, I can tell that you like him."

"How do you know, Cecil?"

"You smiled upon him."

"Saucy girl! Yes; I do like him," she said, slowly. "I think he is 'thorough;,' which was a great word of Mary Shadwell's, and from her meant a good deal.

* * * * *

John Webster walked slowly up and down the length of his long drawing-room.

It was in the gloaming, the very time for dreams, and, to judge by the expression of his face, a pleasant one was his. Cecil Courtayne, accompanied by Miss Shadwell, had that day visited her old home, at the pressing invitation of its new master; and John Webster dwelt upon each little incident of those hours, which had been ones of supreme pleasure to him.

He saw again the light form flitting from flower to flower in his conservatories, the sweet face that banished the gloom from his lonely apartments.

The echoes of her soft voice rang in his ears, and he longed, with a great longing, to have her by his side for ever, and call her wife!

Mr. Webster had consulted his own taste in re-furnishing Severnoak Castle. He chose, as more suitable, mediæval rather than modern furniture, and soft, subdued tints—the very perfection of colouring. Regardless of trouble and expense, he repurchased almost all the paintings, armour, &c., and restored the picture-gallery to its pristine splendour.

When the ladies visited it, Cecil was astonished to see nearly all her ancestors and ancestresses frowning or smiling down upon her, and was almost overcome with emotion as she stood before her father's and mother's portraits, placed side by side; whilst Mary Shadwell fairly sobbed aloud.

The old housekeeper met them as they entered the Castle, and they were waited upon by the old butler at the elegant luncheon, which was served in a small octagon apartment, that had been Lord Severnoak's breakfast-room.

John Webster's father began life as an errand boy in an ironmonger's establishment. He educated himself, and after a time obtained the position of clerk, partner, and eventually, by marrying an only daughter, sole proprietor of the whole concern.

Being a clever, prudent man, he soon amassed riches, and became, as the attorney had informed Lord Severnoaks, an extensive railway contractor, leaving his son, at his death, half a million of money.

John was at that time twenty-five, well educated, and as clever and prudent as his father. He kept on the business, and, being also of a saving turn, added a quarter of a million more to his inheritance. He was at this time forty years old, and had attained a good social position. Growing tired of business, he sold his interest in it, realizing its full value, and determined to spend a few years abroad.

Just about this time business took him into the neighbourhood of Severnoak Castle, and as it was a show place, he visited it. He never forgot it, with its air of antique splendour, its natural beauty, but, above all, its magnificent picture-gallery, the treasures of which enchanted him, as he was both a connoisseur and lover of fine art.

He went abroad, but the recollection of the grand old place haunted him; and on his return to England he was surprised to find it was in the market.

He purchased it immediately, and became, as we have seen, the master of Severnoak Castle. Surely—

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."

Until the day he first beheld Lord Severnoak's daughter the passion of love, with its alternate hopes and fears, was an unknown one to him.

But he has been all this time pacing up and down the drawing-room.

He left it suddenly, and passing through a long corridor, opened the door of a small apartment, called by the domestics "the master's room." It was the one he habi-

tually, occupied, and was simply, indeed plainly, furnished, with but one picture adorning the walls. This was the full-length portrait of a young girl, so well hung that the eyes seemed to follow him wherever he went.

Before this he paused, and Cecil Court-naye's pale face gleamed forth from the canvas with startling distinctness.

It had been painted two years before, by her father's desire, in imitation of an ancestress's portrait, one of the Court beauties, from Lely's brush. Her hair was cut on her forehead, and fell at each side in rippling masses. She wore black velvet with a large pointed collar and cuffs of antique lace, and the white hand fallen upon the rich folds held a blood-red rose. The face was lovely, but oh, so sad, as if prophetic of a coming evil.

Standing before the picture, the man who treasured it gazed upon it with an expression of deep despondency.

"No nearer now than four months ago," he murmured. "Always so sweet and cold. Oh, that I was man enough to learn my fate; anything would be better than these fluctuations of hope and despair. But, my sweet Cecil, could I bear to be banished forever from your presence?"

He had not avoided her; on the contrary, he had sought eagerly every opportunity of being in her company. Lord Severnoak liked him better each time he met him, and he became a prime favourite of Mary Shadwell's. She was not blind, and she saw with pleasure that it only depended upon the girl herself whether she would return to her former home or not; but Cecil was at first quite unconscious that she was the magnet which drew John Webster to the cottage.

She was always polite and cordial to him, for did he not bring her beloved father more pleasure than she had ever hoped to see him enjoy? Presents of game, fruit, flowers, old wine and rare books were showered upon the cottage, and it was impossible to refuse these gifts, for they were presented with such delicate tact that the donor seemed honoured by their acceptance.

But summer came to an end, so did autumn, and the winter was far advanced.

Still John Webster delayed asking the question, which was one of such importance to him.

One afternoon, a few weeks before Christmas, Cecil sat in the drawing-room at work. By chance she was alone. Mary Shadwell had gone out, and Lord Severnoak, in the sanctity of his own apartment, was taking his "forty winks" after dinner.

As Cecil's skilful fingers wrought the bright silks into beautiful flowers her thoughts were busy with the past. Suddenly a well-known knock caused her to start, and mechanically her fingers sought the bell.

More than once of late a suspicion had crossed Cecil's mind, not one very far from the truth; for if John Webster's tongue was silent, his eyes were eloquent enough; anyone short of a fool would have perceived that he was desperately in love, and Cecil was rather a clever girl than otherwise; however, she put all such suspicions aside, very wisely deciding that "sufficient unto the day," &c.

Her first impulse was to deny herself to her visitor, but before she could summon the servant, Jane had ushered Mr. Webster into the room.

Cecil's heart fluttered, but she received him as quietly and gracefully as usual.

"Miss Shadwell has gone into the village," she remarked, as he seated himself.

"Yes, I met her; that is the reason why I came on."

There was an air of resolution about him that told its own story, and in answer to her look of surprise, he drew his chair close to hers, and taking her hand, in manly but passionate words made a declaration of his love.

The short winter day was drawing to a close; there was scarcely any light in the room, but the flames of a bright fire rose and fell upon the girl's shrinking figure and bowed head; her fingers fluttered in his strong clasp, still she did not say anything.

Again he urged his suit, and pleaded as if for his very life.

Cecil withdrew her hand, and in agitated tones almost whispered, "It is so sudden, so unexpected. I must have time."

"It is sufficient that you do not banish me altogether," answered the man, so quietly that it would be impossible to guess how wildly his heart was throbbing. "Do not answer me without reflection. I do not aspire to your love—I know it would be the height of folly for me to do so; but if you will become my wife my life shall be devoted to your service."

"I respect—esteem you highly, Mr. Webster, but—"

"Do not say any more now," he interrupted. "I will come for your answer this day week. You need not fear to trust your future and your father's in my hands; your welfare and his shall ever be my first thought."

"Pray excuse me now," she murmured.

Taking her hands, he pressed them to his lips, and opening the door for her, she

escaped, just as Mary Shadwell was entering the hall.

To her the anxious lover confided his hopes and fears. The good woman was not at all surprised, for she had expected this; and although her sympathies were altogether upon his side, she would not promise to use her influence with Cecil, saying the child should decide for herself; but Mr. Webster was greatly encouraged by her cheerful prophecies as to what that decision would be, and he left the house with a far lighter heart than when he entered it.

"Dear Mary, tell me what to do."

"What does your own heart say, Cecil?"

"It says so many things. He is good and kind, and papa likes him so much; but then I do not love him."

"What do you mean by loving, my dear child?"

"I really cannot tell; I suppose every woman has an idea of her own upon the subject. I like him very much, and by marrying him I would realize the dream of my life—restoring my father to his lost position. But does it not seem very wrong to marry a man simply for that reason? I do not know what to do; advise me, Mary."

"My darling Cecil, you were only three years old when your dying mother put you into my arms. I promised her solemnly never to leave you, but to try and fill her place."

"And well you have done so," interrupted the girl, gratefully, laying her head upon her knee.

Mary Shadwell stroked the bright locks with tender hand, and went on.

"I expected you would come to me in your perplexity, my dear one, and I have been thinking of what to say to you. If I had a daughter in your position, I would question her as I am going to do you."

"Yes."

"What are your exact feelings towards John Webster?"

The girl raised her head, and looked in her friend's face.

"What are my exact feelings? I like him," she said, reflectively; "I am grateful to him for all his kindness; I have even a kind of calm affection for him, and certainly I should not like to lose his friendship."

"And your cousin, Cecil?"

"You do not study the *Times*, Mary, or you would have seen this; I cut it out a month ago."

Cecil took a scrap of paper from her desk, and handed it to Miss Shadwell, who unfolded it and read:—

"On the 13th inst., at St. George's,

Hanover Square, Wilfred, son of the late Major-General Courtnaye, to Arabella, only daughter and heiress of Sir John Baldwin, D.L., Hants House, Loamshire."

"I know now that I did not love Wilfred; I had only a cousinly affection for him, strengthened, perhaps, by old associations. You did not ask me, and I never told you the result of our last interview." And she related what had taken place upon that occasion, concluding with, "You may imagine that even my cousinly affection received a severe blow."

"I am glad he is disposed of in so satisfactory a manner," said Mary, quietly. "I always said he was not 'thorough,' Cecil."

"He wrote, asking me, for a second time, to choose between him and my father. I need scarcely say I did not answer. Now, Mary, any more questions?"

"Yes; one or two. Do you shrink from the idea of becoming Mr. Webster's wife?"

"No," she answered, without a second's hesitation.

"You say you do not love *him*. Are you sure you do not love anyone else?"

"I am certain," she returned, a little impatiently. "After papa and you, I like Mr. Webster better than anyone."

"Then, my darling girl, marry him," said Mary, solemnly. "Make a good man happy, and secure comforts for your father's declining years. John Webster is a good man, and he loves you with his whole heart. I do not give this advice without a great deal of reflection, and without feeling sure that you yourself will learn to return his affection in time."

"He would be generous to my father," said the girl, dreamily, "and papa likes him so much."

"Ah, indeed, Cecil, you may safely trust your own and your father's future to his care!"

"Almost his very words," said Cecil, softly.

"He means what he says. He is a good man, my dear—a good man. If he was not, and was possessed of ten times more wealth, I would not counsel you to link your fate with his."

"And if I did not respect and esteem him, I would not marry him, even for my darling father's sake."

"Obey the dictates of your own heart, my precious child, and you will certainly do what is right."

Cecil's own heart must have told her to marry John Webster, for he received an answer that caused his heart to beat high with rapture; but, controlling his passionate love, he stooped and kissed her quietly,

and the grave kiss seemed to Cecil the seal of a solemn compact.

Lord Severnoak was at first not altogether pleased with his daughter's engagement. He could not all at once overcome those strong "class prejudices" he was so fond of talking about; but after a time he assented heartily enough, and to his credit be it said that the possession of three-quarters of a million did not draw down the scale in John Webster's favour, although the possession of Severnoak Castle may have added a feather-weight to it.

Mary Shadwell was honestly delighted. She saw a long vista of happiness and prosperity before her darling, comfort for her aged benefactor, and the purest delight for herself in witnessing both.

Never, perhaps, was there a more generous lover. The settlements upon Lord Severnoak's daughter were something magnificent, and the day before the wedding he gracefully but firmly insisted upon reinstating her father in his former home, begging that he would remain its master for his life, and receive them as his children on their return from their Continental tour.

The old man resisted, but very feebly, it must be owned, and his delight was so apparent, that Cecil bestowed, unasked, and for the first time, a caress upon her future husband, for a repetition of which he would gladly have given half his fortune.

It need scarcely be told that Mary Shadwell went back to the Castle also.

* * * * *

Two years had passed since John Webster wedded Lord Severnoak's daughter, and to him the months glided by on golden wings, although every hour his heart clamoured for her love. She was a good and dutiful wife, but could scarcely be called a loving one, and the craving in her husband's heart grew stronger and stronger.

Twelve months after his daughter's marriage, Lord Severnoak rejoiced over the birth of a grandson, and the father promised that his boy should take the name of Courtnaye. His word was as good as a bond, and the old man knew that in the future a Courtnaye would still reign at Severnoak.

Just two years had passed, as we said before, since they were wedded, and one sunny morning John Webster and his wife were paying court to the young King of the Castle. He was passing the nursery, when

Cecil called him in to worship the baby autocrat, who lay upon his back, kicking and crowing, and confidentially conversing in a strange tongue with his pink toes. He was a noble fellow, with his mother's dark eyes, his father's strong limbs, and lusty lungs of his own.

"Is he not lovely?" inquired Cecil, kneeling before the cradle, and kissing his dimpled hands.

Baby snatched at her hair, and brought it down all over her shoulders in rippling confusion.

"I never saw such a baby!" said the father, gravely; "and according to his mother, there never was, and never will be, such a one again."

"And what is he according to his father, may I ask?"

"His mother's son," he returned, looking tenderly at her. "Oh, my Cecil, what a different world it would be to me if you loved me as you love your baby—or your father!" he added, in a stifled voice.

Cecil's eyes filled with tears.

During their wedded life her husband had never spoken so before, and the undercurrent of pathos in his tones thrilled her with tenderness.

"John," she said, softly, "kneel down beside me."

He obeyed her, and she put her arms round his neck. "I do love you," she whispered, with her face upon his shoulder.

"Yes," he answered, stroking her hair; "your gentle nature would not allow you to do anything else; but not as I love you, Cecil—not as I would be loved. I could not expect it, for you told me so before you married me."

"Before we were married I did not love you," she said, looking at him with truth in her clear eyes. "I esteemed you then—was grateful to you; but could I live in daily association with you for two years without appreciating your noble nature and great heart? Could I be the recipient of your tender care, see your kindness to my father"—her voice faltered—"your kindness to us all, without learning to return your love? I had a calm affection for you, but now—I love you! I love you!"

"My darling wife!" he said, pressing her to his heart. "Thank Heaven for this. But," he continued, jealously, "you do not love me as well as you do baby?"

"Better, far better!—better than my father! better than the whole world, my husband!"

And so Mary Shadwell's words came true!

YEARS AGO.

BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

I.

"Hot, Phil, isn't it?"

"Hot's nothing, old fellow; it's worse than a furnace. I've taken my shoes off four times since I've had the watch, and emptied them over the side. I'm melting away as fast as ever I can. Losing stones in weight. Bother the place! I wish I could get where there was no climate!"

"Brain seems softening, too, Phil," I said; "you'll have to give up the service, and retire on midshipman's half-pay."

"Thankey," said my messmate; "but not just at present. I hope to see a little of the town first."

These remarks were made years ago, during the reign of his Britannic Majesty King George the Fourth, when our small frigate was just about casting anchor, after we had been for months cooped up in the cribbed, confined space, during a long cruise in the hottest of regions, longing fiercely the while for liberty.

And now we were near New Orleans, a city that we midshipmen looked to find quite a region of romance, with just enough of unhealthiness about it to make a visit exciting, without taking into consideration the Damocles-like life of the inhabitants, who, for their temerity, had the pleasure of knowing that to make a fair balance to their luxurious life, bowie knives were pointed at them, pistols innumerable taking aim at their vitals, and draughts—cunning philters of the old fetish preparation—always ready to send them out of the intoxicating precincts; and last, but certainly not least, there was the pleasure of feeling that at any time there might be a rising of the blacks, one and all intent upon the massacre of their white masters.

Altogether, New Orleans presented plenty of exciting attractions; but midshipmen

are not given to troubling themselves much about the future, and anything in the shape of change would have been snatched at by young men who had been for days sailing over the same waste, performing the same duties, eating the same dry biscuits, receiving the same unvarying reprimands, and keeping the same watches. Now tossed by some howling tempest, drenched with the spray, and compelled to cling to the rigging or belaying-pins for safety; and anon becalmed upon a glassy ocean, with the ship's bows turning slowly and lazily to all the points of the compass—the pitch the while soaking out of the seams, and the brass railings of the quarter-deck ready to blister the hand that sought their support.

What had once been looked forward to as a change, had now palled upon us; and we both declared ourselves sick of the captain's and gun-room dinners, where the same jokes were sure to be cracked, the same inferior viands eaten, and the same constraint to reign. No wonder, then, that we looked forward to anchoring, and obtaining leave to go on shore with letters of introduction, which we had been fortunate enough to obtain.

But it was not till after almost endless vexations, refusals, and excuses on the part of the first lieutenant that my very particular confidant and companion, Philip Harding (who had not fulfilled his prophecy respecting melting quite away), and myself, gained permission to go ashore; and it was not so very long after that we were eagerly making ourselves acquainted with the various novel characteristics of the town; ready enough, too, should opportunity present itself, to take our share of the pleasures afforded by this East in the Far West.

We had both the good luck to be armed with letters which gave us the *entrée* to very good society—our ideas upon such matters being somewhat loose, and Phil often spending an evening at a house on the strength of my letters; while, by a compensating arrangement, I as often took advantage of facilities afforded by my friend. But in those days hospitality was rife; and even without letters, we need not have complained of the reception we should have received; while, as we were situated, we had more invitations and engagements than we could possibly keep. For my part, I was installed at the house of Mr. de l'Estrange, a cotton broker, with whom my father had trading connections; and Harding, by good or bad fortune, was located in the same street.

We met on more than one occasion at the dinners and balls that were popular; and on comparing notes, we found, as a matter of course, that each had in progress an *affaire de cœur*—no surprising thing, when the climate and the fascinations of the beautiful creole girls are taken into consideration.

For my part, I don't think that I was very seriously in love, though Etta de l'Estrange was certainly attractive enough to turn any young man's brain; but I believe that she had showed common sense enough to value my words at their proper currency-rate. The consequence was that we chatted, laughed, danced, and sang together, and carried on a most agreeable boy and girl flirtation, without the prospect of serious injury ensuing to those valuable and brittle chattels, our hearts. In fact, after events proved that the damage was most slight, for after a parting full of vows and promises, I returned in a few years to find my fickle fair one tending decidedly towards *embonpoint*, and taking especial delight in the affairs of her nursery and its last addition, which was shown to me with great pride as the sweetest babe in the world. But I am anticipating the course of events; and, as the sequel will prove, my companion's affair had a very different termination.

Phil was a particularly handsome fellow, tall, well-proportioned, and possessed of the dark piercing eye, well chiselled nose, high forehead, and dark, glossy curling hair, that go so regularly to make up the hero of a novel; while, what in my opinion added largely to his good looks, was his utter ignorance or *insouciance* concerning the fact; for a young man more free from affectation it would have been hard to find.

Some men, with such a stock-in-trade of

good looks, would have called in the aid of dress, colour, and jewellery, with which to attain to the perfection of dandyism; but not so Phil, who, in his neat blue uniform hurriedly bundled on, looked the image of careless content with the world at large, in everything save its heat.

One night, after we had been ashore about three weeks, I accompanied him to a ball given at the house of one of the local grandees—a sugar or cotton grower, I'm sure I forget which; and on our setting out together, I found, from two or three hints that were dropped, that if my behaviour merited such an indulgence, I was to be introduced to the fair inamorata to whose glances my friend had succumbed.

It was the sultriest of sultry nights; and upon reaching the house, or rather palace, standing amidst quite a grove of orange-trees, we could see, through the open windows, the already well-filled rooms; the same being, to a young and ardent man, fresh from the confinement of shipboard, a vision of enchantment. For the brilliant lights shone out upon the richly-foliaged gardens, where, amidst flowers laden with the most luscious fragrance, the fire-flies were darting to and fro, and playing around in many a swift-winged scintillation. Here and there, too, were groups seeking, beneath the dewy moon, for the coolness denied by the crowded rooms, in spite of jalousie, ice, and plashing fountains.

With so bright a scene before us, we were not long in joining the dancers, and comparing notes of our impressions concerning the music, the fair girls in their light drapery, the splendour of the saloons, and lastly the wine—all matters tending to make the evening one of the most delightful that we had ever spent.

I soon lost sight of Phil, and did not see him again for a couple of hours, though I must confess that I had not felt the loss of my friend, nor noticed the rapid flight of time; when just in the midst of the polite speech I was trying to make to my last partner, I felt a hand laid upon my shoulder, and turning, saw Phil at my side, with, seen through the *couleur de rose* glasses worn that evening, the most lovely girl I had ever beheld.

She was——But stay, I am no painter of female beauty; and to be fair, prejudiced as I was on that night, and excited by the scene, mine could be no just description.

The customary introduction was gone through, and in the short conversation which ensued, enough was said to display to me the good taste my friend had exercised in his choice.

I had just finished the next dance, in which I had Mademoiselle Levine for a partner, entrusted to me for the time being by Phil, and certainly the most fascinating companion I had encountered that evening, when a tall, dark, sallow man stepped up to us, and without noticing me, rudely took my partner by the hand, saying, "Come, Manette, it is my turn now."

There was a pained look in the young girl's face, and for a moment she hung back; but recovering herself, with a faint smile, she thanked me, and directly after I found myself alone in the middle of the room, feeling, if not looking, very stupid—not having, in those days, achieved to the armour which enables a polished man to bear, unmoved, the gaze of some hundred eyes fixed upon his every movement.

But my chagrin was not decreased when, a minute after, Harding came up, exclaiming, "Why, where is Miss Levine? You have surely never left her?"

"Left her, be hanged!" I said, pettishly; "she left me."

"Where?—how?—when?" exclaimed Harding.

"Where?—how?—when? Why, what an impetuous fire-eater you have grown!" I said. "She left me here, in this very spot I am now standing upon, for I have been too much taken aback to move."

"But how was it?" cried Phil.

"Led off by the ugliest, tallow-faced, unhung scoundrel you ever set eyes upon."

"Tall, sallow fellow?" exclaimed Phil.

"The very same; and they went into the refreshment-room just as you came out of the card saloon."

My friend turned pale with anger and jealousy, and, without another word, hurried towards the room indicated; and I followed, not liking the appearance of things in general—knowing, too, enough of the hot-blooded people amongst whom we were staying, to be alarmed lest any outbreak should take place, and thinking that, from my influence with Harding, I might avert mischief, should any be brewing.

Upon entering the room devoted to refreshments, I could see my late partner seated by a small, marble-topped table, upon which stood a cup of untasted coffee; while by her side, keeping, as it were, watch and ward, was my unceremonious friend who had robbed me with so much coolness and in so cavalier a manner.

As Phil and I neared the table, the lady gave a slight start of pleasure, and, leaving her seat, was about to take Harding's arm; but she was prevented by her sallow companion, who leaped up, and oversetting the table, caught her rudely by the shoulder,

saying, "No; there has been enough of this foolery for one night. You can stay with me now;" and he accompanied his speech with a scowl of hatred at Harding.

I could see the blood tingling in Philip's cheeks, as, by a violent effort, he controlled the passion that was rising within him. But, without appearing to notice the insulting look, he again offered his arm to the lady, saying, "I believe, Miss Levine, your uncle entrusted you to my care for this evening?"

"Oh, yes!" she replied, hastily, and with trembling voice. "Indeed, it is not my wish—"

What more she would have said was stayed by her companion, who stooped down, hissed something in her ear, and then proceeded to almost drag her away.

This was too much for Harding, who, retaining my late partner's hand, by a well-directed push sent his rival sprawling over the prostrate table, and then tried to hurry the frightened girl from the room, while I endeavoured to cover his retreat.

It was well I did so, for, with a howl of execration, the fallen man sprang up, and dashed towards Harding.

For a moment, I did not perceive what he grasped in his hand; but the next instant I saw that it was something glittering, when a cold shudder of dread seemed to dart through my frame, and to paralyze my every movement.

The saloon was in a moment in a wild state of confusion; women screamed, and the men hurried to the spot, but too late to prevent the catastrophe that ensued.

Recovering myself somewhat, I cried out to Harding to be upon his guard, and, darting forward, caught our enemy by the arm, as he came up, when he struck me a sharp blow upon the shoulder with his right hand, and for the moment I felt so numbed and helpless, that I loosened my hold, and staggered back.

The next spring he made was at Harding, and a sickly feeling came over me as I now plainly made out that he held a long knife gleaming in his hand.

Then there was a momentary struggle—a white form glided before my friend—and then, as a wild shriek, taken up by more than one female voice, rang through the saloon, the crowd closed round the principal actors in the scene, and the combatants seemed to be separated.

II.

THE blow given me by my assailant seemed to have stupefied me to some extent. I felt confused and strange, as if some nerve had been struck which had given a shock

"THE CUSTOMARY INTRODUCTION WAS GONE THROUGH." (See p. 79.)



to my system; but, recovering myself, I saw the sallow man, whom I now heard spoken of as Canville, led away by several gentlemen, and Harding, the centre of a group, holding up Manette Levine, who hung, faint and bleeding, upon his arm.

Poor girl! To save Harding, she had thrown herself in the way of the blow directed at him, and received it upon her cheek, which displayed a dreadful gash, whose bleeding every effort of my old friend seemed vain to staunch.

But medical assistance was at hand; and after the surgeon had performed his part, the light form was borne, amidst the sympathizing exclamations of the lookers-on, to a carriage waiting at the door.

Phil helped to carry her, and, in a dreamy fashion, I looked on, until we were somewhat summarily dismissed by the doctor, who leaped in, and the carriage was driven off, when we turned to walk together to the town.

Before we had gone far, Phil laid his hand upon my shoulder, causing me to flinch with pain, as he said, somewhat sadly, "You must be choking with curiosity, old fellow, to know the ins and outs of this genuine romance of real life—for it is almost like a scene from a melodrama. But, hallo!" he cried, "what's this?" And he held up his hand, which, as well as his wristband, was smeared with blood, just visible by the light of a carriage lamp which passed. "Blood!—more blood! Why, one of us must have had a scratch from that fellow's knife!"

"I suppose I was the lucky one," I said, lazily; for the ground seemed to be moving beneath my feet, and a strange feeling of sickness coming on, when, giving a lurch and a stagger, I should have fallen had not Phil caught me in his arms, after which, all seemed to fade away into nothingness.

When I recovered consciousness, I found myself upon a table in a drinking saloon, close by where I had fainted; and soon after I was removed to the house where Harding was staying, the ship's surgeon came to my aid, and tightly bandaged my shoulder, which, upon raising myself, I found had received rather a severe flesh-cut, but, luckily, of so superficial a character, that a slight weakness from loss of blood would probably be the extent of my suffering.

"You see," said the surgeon, pleasantly, "the blade glanced from the bone, or the arm would have been transfixed, and the point of the knife might have penetrated to the lungs; in which case internal hæmorrhage would probably have ensued, and——"

"There, for goodness sake hold your tongue, Mr. Edgley; the poor fellow is white enough already! Don't worry him with what might have happened, when he has escaped!" said Phil.

"But you must keep perfectly still," said the surgeon, "or I shall not hold myself answerable for consequences;" and he looked fiercely on Harding, as much as to say, "Now, call that worrying, sir, if you dare!"

Promises were made, such as would most probably soon be forgotten, and soon after, the surgeon took his leave; when, as I evinced not the slightest disposition to sleep, Phil proceeded to give me some explanation of the affair which I had witnessed the previous night, for daylight was close at hand.

I could easily understand that rivalry was the moving power in the proceedings; but still, the explanation of several points seemed necessary to thoroughly enlighten me upon the subject.

It appeared that Manette Levine was an orphan, the ward of her uncle, Pierre Canville, father of the sallow-faced individual who had brought on so trist a termination to our evening's pleasure. Harding had met her at the house of one of the families to whom he had been introduced, and had become deeply enamoured, in despite of the lowering looks and sneers of her cousin, Louis Canville, who could ill brook this interposition between himself and one whom, without consulting her wishes, he had always looked upon as his future wife. Harding had, upon more than one occasion, come into contact with Canville, but had suffered his brutal words and sneering remarks unresented, feeling, as he did, from the favour accorded him, able to be generous and forbearing. In fact, until the previous night, my messmate had always managed to control his temper under every slight, even to hearing the coarse taunts of the creole, for the sake of his cousin, who had, on more than one occasion, expressed her fears lest Louis should display his temper in some mad fit or another.

The circumstances of the past night, though, had been more than Phil could brook, since the insults had not only been in public, but directed in the most brutal manner at the fragile girl, who had not only won his heart, but had brought every chivalrous feeling that existed in his breast into full play.

At length I tried to sleep, but that was out of the question; for now, in his excitement, Harding was impatiently pacing the room, with hurried strides, waiting for the

morning to be sufficiently advanced for him to go and inquire concerning the state of the poor wounded girl. He had been bitterly reproaching himself for not insisting upon being allowed to accompany her home; but the action of the doctor was peremptory, and, in the excitement of the time, his orders had been implicitly obeyed.

I closed my eyes while he was pacing the room, and I suppose I must have fallen into a short stupor-like sleep; for, upon looking around once more, I found that the sun's rays were streaming through the green jealousies, and that I was alone.

I rose from the bed, feeling weak, parched with thirst, and with considerable pain in my shoulder; when, finishing my dressing as well as my wounded arm would allow, I sat down by the window, took a book, and tried to read; but my head soon drooped, and I slept again.

Once more opening my eyes, I found Harding by my side.

"She's very bad," he said, hurriedly. "The old black servant, her nurse, is terribly enraged with Canville, and says that she is quite delirious; but the doctor tells me that, though disfigured, she is in no danger. But this is not the worst of it: that scoundrel of a cousin has sent me a challenge, and I have accepted it."

"What!—a duel?" I exclaimed.

"Yes," he said, grimly; "a duel. Of course, I don't like it, and feel a bit cowardly," he continued, with a half-laugh; "but, as an English officer and a gentleman, I felt compelled to agree to go out with him. If I had not, it would have been like bringing dishonour upon the flag; while now that I have, I suppose, if it gets wind on board, the skipper will try all he knows to put a stop to it. But we must keep it quiet; for really I can't help feeling towards the fellow as if he were some wild beast, after the injury he has done that poor girl, even though it was not intentional. I don't want to shoot him, and have his blood upon my conscience all my life, besides shutting myself out from ever seeing Manette again. But it seems that if I don't shoot him, he will me; and I need hardly say that such a proceeding does not at all suit my views. Ah, well!" he sighed, "*laissez aller*, as they say here. To-morrow morning will decide; and now, who is to be my second?"

"Why, if it must come to that, I will," I said.

"What, with that damaged fin?" exclaimed Phil, laughing. "No, my boy, that won't do; while, if we venture our confidences on board the frigate, we may depend

upon there soon being a corporal and a file of marines to convey us on board, and then good-bye to all farther liberty."

"But then there would be no further duel," said I.

"While I should be stigmatized before Manette as a coward and a cur!" said Harding.

"But life is life," I ventured to observe.

"I don't know, my dear boy, that it would be, without Manette," he said.

"And, besides, I know what would follow. I should be sneaking away, so as to leave the coast clear for that ill-looking scoundrel! No, my boy; shoot me first, say I, now; and I don't think I shall alter my opinion when it comes to the point."

The difficulties of obtaining a second were at length overcome by the selection of a young creole officer in the United States' army, whom we had several times met, and who expressed his complete willingness to aid to the best of his power, but joined with me strongly in my suggestions for a compromise.

But Phil was determined, and at every remark upon the subject declared that nothing should prevent him from keeping to his part of the compact; so that more than once I was strongly tempted to send a message on board, giving, anonymously, a broad hint as to what was in the wind; but sundry ideas concerning honour stayed me, and with an aching heart I let matters take their course.

The time, too, was short for consideration; or the prospect of something occurring to hinder the meeting; and I had to hear and see all the preparations entered into by Phil's second, who eagerly displayed his zeal. The opposing second was seen; the exact hour and place arranged; all other preliminaries adjusted. And now nothing remained but to wait with what patience we might the lapse of time.

III.

HARDING had thoroughly gained over one of the servants at Mr. Canville's villa—the old black nurse, who had brought up Manette from a child; and, as my mess-mate told me, the old woman, in her broken English intermingled with French, was vowing all sorts of vengeance against Canville *filz*, for the injury he had done her child. She hated him most fervently, and had hailed the handsome young lover of her darling as one worthy of the treasure he sought; while, seeing the gratification it afforded her foster-child, she had aided their meetings in every possible way. But when Manette was taken home wounded, her rage knew no bounds; and

when, afterwards, she saw my friend, she accused him of want of spirit for not slaying the villain.

Through that long day we kept on obtaining news of Manette's state, each account growing less favourable, until ten o'clock, when, learning that the poor girl had sunk into an easy slumber, Phil lay down upon the sofa, tired out, and needing some rest, so as to enable him to firmly meet the stern duty appointed for the next morning at daybreak.

On my part, I had determined to be present at the meeting, and, to prevent opposition to my wishes, I said nothing respecting my intentions. During the day the second lieutenant had been to see us, and left orders that as soon as I was sufficiently recovered, we were both to return on board; but we gave him to understand that I should not be well enough for two or three days farther. And, indeed, but for the intense interest I took in the proceedings afoot, I should have kept my bed, so fevered and ill did I feel.

My plan was to go quietly with Harding—taking it for granted that I was to be of the party. Captain Merret was to call us in the morning, and a signal had been arranged by which he could summon us at any hour.

Harding had not lain down many minutes before he was fast asleep—sleeping with a tranquillity that would hardly have led anyone to suppose that it might possibly be his last sleep on earth, and that for certain he would stand face to face with death at the rising of the morrow's sun. I could not help feeling for him something akin to admiration as he lay there, and thinking to myself that, after all, perhaps England's sons did deserve some of the praise so often given to them by the writers of our land.

As for self, the rest I had taken during the day, the pain of my wound, and the feverish thirst which troubled me, quite precluded the idea of sleep, and I lay watching for hour after hour, thinking over the events of the past day and night, and wishing that we were both safe on board again; anything being preferable to such liberty as this.

At about half-past three I called Harding, when he started up, wakeful and alert in a moment, crying, "I've been dreaming that I was going to fight; and, by George!" he cried, checking himself, suddenly, "so I am!" when the recollection of the morning duties seemed to come over him like a cloud.

But he was himself again in a minute, and apparently quite equal to the emergency. He walked to the window, and

stood thinking for a few minutes, after which he returned to where I was sitting.

"There is no harm in being prepared for the worst, Fred," he said; "so, if anything should happen, see Manette, and ask her not to blame me, telling her how I was placed in the affair. As to the old country and those there, you know them all, so can tell what I should wish to have said."

"There, there!" I said; "don't talk after that fashion; duels don't always end in deaths, old fellow. Why, we shall be back, man, enjoying a good breakfast; for Canville will apologize, be kicked, and then bolt, leaving the land free to the lover of the fair Manette."

Phil smiled, and then I poured some wine from a decanter, and he had raised it to his lips just as the pre-arranged signal was heard beneath; when, setting down the glass, and going to the window, he replied to the call, and then returned to make his few remaining preparations before starting.

As I had fully expected, he strongly opposed my accompanying them; but I was determined, weak and fevered as I was; and in the course of a few minutes we were out in the cold gray morning, returning our companion's studied, formal salute.

It was hardly light; but I could plainly make out, beneath his cloak, the square outline of a pistol-case, when, turning sharply, he led the way, and after a quarter of an hour's brisk walk, we reached the place of rendezvous—an opening by a plantation, with not a house for certainly half a mile.

There seemed to be a mutual feeling of satisfaction that we were first upon the ground; and, taking me by the arm, Captain Merret pointed out to me the various capabilities and suitabilities of the place, all of which he declared to be admirable.

We waited a quarter of an hour amongst the dewy grass, and then the sun rose, sending a golden sheaf of arrows glancing and darting through the heavy mist. Half an hour slipped by—three quarters—one hour; and then, completely out of patience, Merret burst out with a volley of French execrations.

He had always thought so; it was just like the man who would use a knife. Mr. Harding was to blame for promising to meet such a cur, who assumed to be a gentleman. Canville was *un lâche*, a poltroon, everything cowardly that he could think of, till he was quite hoarse; when he raised his hat to us both, and hoped that we would excuse his excitement, subsiding, then, into the quiet, gentlemanly officer, as he lit a fresh cigar.

Waiting seemed, at last, to be labour in vain; and Merret declaring that Phil had thoroughly acted out his part, and done all that was necessary, we started back, and partook of a most jovial breakfast together—Merret impressing upon us both that it was utterly impossible for Harding to again offer to meet Canville, who was, by his conduct, quite *hors de société*.

For my part, I was only too glad for the affair to have had so peaceable an ending; for though I should have had no remorse if Canville had been winged, and had to suffer the twinges he had caused in my arm, I was quite willing to give up my chance of revenge, so that Phil was safe.

After awhile, my messmate gave me a hint, when, passing the claret, I engaged Merret in conversation, so that Phil was enabled to slip off, as I easily surmised, to obtain news of Manette.

It was quite a couple of hours before he returned, when the captain having been duly thanked, and taken his departure, we were able to chat without restraint.

I had been able to perceive, on his return, that something was wrong, and a dread seemed to come upon me that it was ill news respecting the wounded girl. Harding, too, was greatly agitated; and now, upon inquiring the cause, he told me that he had wronged Canville concerning his courage, for that he was dead. He had expired, in horrible torture, about an hour before, apparently from a severe attack of cholera. But as Harding was leaving the grounds, the old black woman brought him a few lines from Manette; and as she gave them, told him of what he already knew—his rival's death—with such a malignant semblance of triumph, that he came away with the full conviction that she had poisoned the man whom she looked upon as the bitter enemy of her foster-child.

IV.

HARDING's may have been only suspicions; but versed as the old negro-woman was in fetishism, there was every probability that she had used some drug with whose deadly properties she was familiar. But Canville was supposed to have died of that dread

scourge, cholera; and before I returned on ship-board, the young man's sudden death had ceased, in that volatile city, to cause comment.

I was heartily sick of the shore, having suffered a great deal from my wound through not taking proper precautions at first, and was glad to be once more on board the frigate, in spite of its privations and confinement; having found out that there is a reverse side to even pleasure, though mine was hardly a fair specimen of a pleasure trip.

But my joy was not shared by Harding, who walked the quarter-deck for weeks after, sighing fiercely, and making himself generally disagreeable to the ship's company.

Time slipped by, and changes took place, foremost amongst which was Phil's leaving the service, for which, of late, he had declared himself to be utterly unsuited, being in command of a fortune ample to make him dissatisfied with the midshipman's berth, and the prospect of slow promotion.

As I have before intimated, I visited New Orleans once more, and to pass there a far more pleasant time. Certainly I found no expectant lover awaiting my return, but we were very good friends, notwithstanding. But, at this second visit, the pleasantest part of my sojourn was at the house of my old messmate, now settled down upon an estate growing cotton for the Liverpool market.

He told me one day, in confidence, that the old nurse had confessed, upon her death-bed, the crime of which we had suspected her; but he implored me to be careful, and not to mention it before his wife, whom I found now, though somewhat matronly, the same charming woman I had before encountered in Manette Levine.

The scenes I have attempted to describe are still vividly impressed on my memory; and, in the quiet of eventide, I can always recall that gay city and its semi-Eastern pictures, its dark-skinned beauties, and enervating climate; all springs freshly to memory once again, although these matters happened years ago.

SOME AUTHENTICATED GHOST STORIES.

BY H. L. COWEN.

I.

THE DOCTOR'S STORY.

My speciality (said Doctor Carrington) is treating soldiers, but in the capital of an Eastern colony where I was once stationed I was often asked to visit other patients.

Now, as the story I am about to relate is substantially true, it will manifestly be unwise to give persons and places their correct designations; the names of the former I shall therefore entirely fictionize, while the latter I intend only so to disguise that anyone happening to know ever so little of the locality will be able to see through the mystification.

First, then, the scene of my narrative lies in one of the most picturesque and prosperous possessions Great Britain has in the Indian Ocean.

Once upon a time the Portuguese held it, or, speaking by the card, its seaboard portions; so also did the Dutch, from whom dear old dead-and-gone John Company took it, *vi et armis*, but ceded it to the Crown for a consideration. The Doms have the credit of founding and building the chief city, the Mynheers fortified and strengthened it, and we English have enlarged, improved, and otherwise made the place commercially a most pretentious one.

Let me elect to call the colony Pearl Island, and its principal town Cocoburg, that appellation being derived from the large and dense belts of cocoanut trees which thickly fringe its shores.

Now, in the northern suburb of Cocoburg, there stood a large mansion, isolated within its own grounds. Don't suppose that this said mansion, although imposing after its kind, was a bit like a house of the same size and claim in Europe, or that its

grounds at all resembled those of a country seat in England. Quite the contrary. The domicile was in every respect of the Anglo-Indian type, and its "grounds" an extensive track—compound is the technical name—of grass and scrub, with many clumps or topes of palms, fruit, and other tropical trees.

And in saying that from its frontage a charming outlook was obtained of a long stretch of sea, alive always with the swift outriggered canoes of the native fishermen, and that from its back the eye gazed upon a wide-spreading landscape of distant fields and blue mountains, while more in the foreground the course of a noble river could be traced, I am done with Seelie House—that is the name I choose for the homestead—so far, at least, as description is concerned.

It had seen many a tenant, this same habitat, and at one stage of its existence was the residence of a high colonial official.

He was a man of tall and gaunt proportions; his face, sad in expression and naturally void of rosiness, had become almost cadaverously pale from the effects of tropical bleaching; and with his dark, prominent eyes, thick eyebrows, and sunken cheeks, ladies would hardly have designated him "bonnie" or attractive.

Two personal peculiarities made him conspicuous. First, he wore a beard which, at the time I speak of, was a most unusual practice among Englishmen; and next, he had lost an arm by amputation. In his presence folk addressed him as Sir Angus Strongitharm; behind his back they spoke of him either as Don Quixote or the Rabbi. People were fond of calling each other nicknames in Pearl Island.

Be it known, then, that in the year 186— Seelie House was inhabited by a barrister

whose patronymic, according to my nomenclature, was Champneys, and he and his charming wife were entertaining therein, at Yule-tide, a host of guests, chiefly from the estates up country.

Among these guests was a young lady, recently arrived in the island; and as she is the heroine of my story, and, moreover, was the belle of Cocoburg society at the time, I should be dubbed ungallant and neglectful if I did not devote a few words to paint her picture, so far as words can do it.

Her Christian name was Effie, and until she changed at the hymeneal altar her present surname for that of a well-beloved captain of my regiment—a contingency not very remote, so gossip had it—as Somerville that surname stood; Effie Somerville, a smooth, liquid, and lovable cognomen, as cognomens generally go.

She was a maiden of about nineteen years of age, full of life and life's young hopes, as maidens of nineteen should be.

In face, the painter's perfect model, if he wanted one, for Queen Berengaria; the shade of whose blue eyes, the shape of whose Grecian nose, the exact sheen of whose golden hair, the pearly lustre of whose teeth, and the smoothness and purest whiteness of whose skin—perhaps the transparent soap of the Mr. Pears, of Richard Cœur de Lion's reign made it so, who can tell?—we all know, so why go over them again piecemeal?

In figure, the sculptor would have exulted over the marvellous symmetry of her neck, arms, bust, and *tournure*; and having graven these with cunning hand into the counterfeit presentment of the fair girl herself, would, like another Pygmalion, have fallen in love with the image he himself had created.

Well, as aforetold, Miss Somerville was one of those who were enjoying the hospitalities of Seelie House, and entering *con amore* into the gaities of Cocoburg at Christmas time.

That Anglo-Indian city, dull and depressing all the year round, invariably broke out into all sorts and conditions of hilarity during these holidays; not only were there sounds of revelry by night, but by day also.

It was the last night of the old year, and a grand regimental ball at our mess was to see it out, and to usher the new one in.

Effie, who had been busied for hours with tarletan and lace, with ribbons and flounces, and had fabricated for herself the most captivating of dance costumes, had retired into her own room, to don the "war-paint"

and otherwise arm herself for manslaughter.

Contrary to every usage of civilized society, and rude as it no doubt is, I am bound to let you peep into that sacred penetralia, otherwise you will hardly realize completely the surroundings of my story.

It was a large and airy apartment, placed somewhat away, though yet under the same roof as the rest of the bungalow—nay, I beg its pardon—mansion.

Several wide slips of cane matting covered its floor, upon which the lightest tread would rustle, and so make footsteps heard.

A low bedstead, a few chairs, a wardrobe, or, to give it its proper Indian designation, an almirah, a well-appointed dressing-table—these were the articles of furniture with which the "bower" was garnished, save and except a large cheval glass, of "Europe muster,"—that is to say, not manufactured in Pearl Island.

In the days of Sir Angus Strongitharm's tenure of Seelie House, this room had been no sleeping one, but the snug and favourite lounge of the worthy knight himself.

Into it, then, I repeat, the young lady had shut herself for her toilette, her hostess, as she entered, hearing her warble merrily the air of a popular melody.

An hour or so after, Mr. Champneys, waiting impatiently in all the agonies of a broadcloth dress-suit on a hot tropical night the appearance of his wife and guest to set out for our ball, heard a loud and piercing shriek issue from the direction of Miss Somerville's room, and evidently from that young lady herself—no ayah or other native woman ever screamed after that fashion.

Summoning his spouse, they both rushed to ascertain the cause; and going in, found the poor girl, nearly dressed, stretched upon the floor, senseless and gasping for breath.

After applying such restoratives as occurred to their scared senses, and finding them ineffectual, they sent post haste to beg my presence, and I was soon with them.

Lying upon her bed inanimate was the maiden who but a few minutes before was in her very zenith of health and loveliness.

Her teeth were firmly pressing upon her lips, so firmly that they had caused them to bleed; her face was ashy pale, her features were distorted; her eyes were wide open and gazing fixedly on vacancy; the fingers of both hands were rigidly stiff and clenched upon her palms; and from a small wound upon her forehead a few drops of blood had trickled and stained her cheek, neck, and shoulder.

Save that she was breathing, and her pulse was beating slowly, she might have been mistaken for one in death—a death, too, which had occurred amid scenes of violence and horror.

At first I was sorely puzzled to account for Miss Somerville's condition; then I established it in my own mind that a sudden and terrible alarm had caused it.

But what?

That was undiscoverable; nor could Mr. or Mrs. Champneys give the slightest clue to it.

Up to the moment when her cry had been heard no one could have been better or merrier, looking forward as she was to the party and her dances and love passages with Dobell of "ours," her *fiancée*.

Waiting as long as I could, and giving my directions for management, I took my way, depressed enough, to our ball; for understand that I, being one of the givers, could hardly absent myself from it altogether.

The news of Miss Somerville's disaster had got about, and her non-presence threw quite a damper upon the entertainment.

Many times during the next forty-eight hours did I visit and revisit Seelie House.

I found little or no change in Effie, still half-comatose, still cataleptic.

But just as I was beginning to despair utterly of her recovery, nature shook itself, as it were, from the nervous shock, the trance passed away, and Effie awoke to life and lucidity.

I need not allude to the delicate and cautious process by which, after a while, the Champneys and I wormed out the strange cause of Miss Somerville's state as we had discovered it on that New Year's Eve.

Better, too, to give the account in her own words than to trust it to my relating.

"I was dressing," said she, "my thoughts intent upon how the white rose I was to wear in my hair could be most becomingly arranged. I had settled the point, and was fixing the flower, standing before the cheval-glass, when, oh, merciful Heaven! I saw behind me, reflected on the mirror, the face and figure of a man—such a remarkable and never-to-be-forgotten man—tall, thin, ghastly white, wearing a beard, and yes!—I could not possibly be mistaken—with one arm only!

"He was gazing intently into the glass, and I thought I saw his chest heave as if in the act of sighing.

"Turning round, I exclaimed, 'How dare you, sir, come into my room! Leave it! I shall call for Mr. Champneys,' when, without the slightest noise on the mats, he

walked slowly before me and disappeared. I hardly realized what I had seen until I flew to the door and found it locked inside as I myself had locked it.

"Then I shrieked for help—and I know no more."

"Nonsense, Miss Effie," said Champneys.

"Mere illusion and brain trickery, from excitement or dyspepsia," I observed, "the thing is common."

"Illusion, dyspepsia, or whatever else you like to call it, Doctor Carrington, I saw that man as plainly as I now see you; and he was a person I had never in my life looked upon before."

We got bothered did Champneys and I.

"If this be a ghost which has interviewed Effie," the lawyer observed, "it is the ghost of old Don Quixote come to have a look at his quondam home, for the girl is perfect to the letter in her description of him. As she says, she never could have seen him, as she is but recently in Pearl Island, and he left it years ago; is rarely talked about, almost forgotten. Besides, he is alive and well, residing on his little property in Skye. It is marvellous though, isn't it? Beats me altogether. I'll tell you what I shall do, if you approve. Old Carolus Vanderbosh, a burgher and a former *protégé* of Strongitharm's, has an oil-colour portrait of him; I'll borrow it, and bring it home."

"Good," said I; "do so."

A night or two after, Champneys appeared with a faded picture under his arm. In a roundabout way he brought the incident of the illusion on the *tapis*, and laughingly said, "Oh, by the way, Effie, I am going to turn detective, and to find out that ill-bred old chap who disturbed you in your room on New Year's Eve."

"How, Mr. Champneys?" Miss Somerville asked.

"I have got his portrait. Is this sufficiently like to set the police on his track?"

"Oh! oh! oh!" she cried, as her eyes fell upon the canvas, "the very, very man; the same beard, the same face, the same eyes, the same loss of one arm. How strange! how startling! Track him, Mr. Champneys? How can you? He is dead, and I have seen his ghost!"

* * * * *

If these things are to be believed at all, it was so.

On the arrival of the next mail from England it was heard that Sir Angus Strongitharm had died on the very night when Effie Somerville saw him in her room—once his room—in Seelie House, Pearl Island.

Marvellous! and not to be satisfactorily accounted for, philosophy notwithstanding.

II.

THE CANTATRICE'S STORY.

Most of us artists had heard the report that the Teatro Reale, in the city of Benvenuto, was haunted.

People declared that on any night when Bellini's opera of "*I Montecchi e I Capuletti*" happened to be performed there the ghost of the slain *Mercutio* appeared to the *Giulietta*, whoever she might be, and scared that lady more or less; generally more than less.

The accredited story of the cause of the apparition was that many, many years ago the actor then filling the part of *Romeo* at the theatre I have named had quarrelled with him playing *Mercutio*, anent a marked predilection which *Giulietta* in her everyday and off the stage existence exhibited towards the said *Mercutio*, and to revenge himself he (*Romeo*) had taken the opportunity when he interfered in the duel with *Tybalt* of giving poor *Mercutio* a thrust with his sword, which wounded him so grievously that he died within an hour in the dressing-room appropriated to the first lady of the company, and to which, as the nearest apartment, the injured gentleman had been conveyed.

Such was the legend; and as for the ghost making itself visible to *prima donnas*, that was unmistakable.

Signoras Catasqualli and Screechvelli had both seen it, or said they had, which came to the same thing.

And Sottovoce, the fat and antiquated soprano! Why, when it stood before her, it so completely shook her nerves, that never from that evening could she again attempt dramatic singing. But then folk were uncharitable enough to say that Sottovoce's organ was gone from old age, obesity, and Dublin stout; and that on the night previous to the apparition she had been so "goosed" (the exertions of the *claque* notwithstanding) that the administration of the Teatro Reale had said, "It is enough, madame; you must go into retirement and give lessons, the public will no longer listen to you on the boards."

So you will quite understand that when, in 187—, Il Signor Costa-Monga engaged me for a tour through the Italian provinces, stipulating not only the characters I was to take, but the places where such were to be taken, I was much alarmed at finding that "*I Montecchi e I Capuletti*" was named in the *répertoire*, and the Teatro Reale, Benvenuto, the very identical spot where it was to be rendered.

With tears in my eyes, I begged the director to substitute another opera for the

"spectre" one, as we were wont to call it; but Costa-Monga, who was a terrible self-willed savage, and could gaze unmoved upon a young girl's tears, replied, "No; certainly not. *Romeo* is my tenor, Enrico Collini's"—his real name was 'Arry Collings, and he was an Englishman, born in 'Ackney—"best character; in the serenade scene he takes his not-to-be-equalled G sharp in alto, and I could not deprive Collini of his G for all the world. Therefore, charming Signorina Violette di Qualchi Cosa, you will either sing, as I propose, *Giulietta*, in Benvenuto, or you will sing not at all in my troupe. The option rests with you entirely, *ma belle*."

What could I do? I was young, and had my name to make, otherwise I would have said, "Go to the dickens, my dis-obliging friend. I shall not take the rôle of the love-sick Capulet girl, and run the risk of being confronted with the wraith of *Mercutio*, dead and turned to clay. If you be not contented with *Marguerite* and *Zerlina*, with *Lucrecia* and *Amina*, with *Lucia* and *Elvira*, and half a dozen other star parts of mine, *addio*; it will suit my book equally well, or better, to engage with Mapelsoni, who wants me." But as neither my rising reputation nor my purse could afford the loss, into the provinces I went with the Costa-Monga.

It is quite unnecessary to tell you in what rotation we took the different cities of King Humbert's dominions, or what operas we gave in each; enough to say that quite at the end of our theatrical outing we found ourselves in Benvenuto, which then had, and still has, the reputation of being the most musical town of musical Italy, the noble art being deeply loved and cultivated there, just as it is in your Manchester of England.

In this celebrated abode of melody and its votaries our success was marked; and as "*Norma*," "*Somnambula*," and other works of the great *maestro* Bellini had been rendered by us, I endeavoured once again—upon the *toujours perdrix* principle—to induce Costa-Monga to eliminate "*I Montecchi e I Capuletti*" from his list, and more particularly so as one morning, upon my going to the Teatro Reale for rehearsal, I had found the following billet left for me with the stage-doorkeeper:—

"One who has seen the shade of Signor Beluomini, the slain *Mercutio* of this theatre, warns the young *prima donna* to avoid the character of *Giulietta*, and let the dead rest."

When I showed this note to Costa-

Monga, he burst out laughing, said what in English may be translated as "bosh," and declared that the whole thing was a ruse of Rivalli, an opposition tenor of Collini, to prevent his singing the serenade I have spoken of.

"No, my little one," he continued; "I never alter my programme, and the work we talk about must be represented, for see this!"

He brought out of a corner of his office a huge coloured poster, ready to be placarded all over the place. It read thus:—

"On Monday next will be produced, with grand scenic effect, Bellini's favourite tragic opera, "I Montecchi e I Capuletti." Romeo, Signor Enrico Collini; *Giulietta*, Signorina Violette di Qualchi Cosa. During the ball scene the world-famed *danseuse*, Mademoiselle Blancpied, from the Grand Opera in Paris, will give her marvellous *pas de Diablerie*, and her renowned galop, *Des Grimaces et des Contortions*. Conductor, Herr Steeke."

What could I now do?

Simply nothing but let matters take their course.

I had

"— set my life upon a cast,
And must withstand the hazard of the die."

or, to be correct, the dead. Besides, who could say? Maybe the ill-fated *Mercutio*, who had frightened the uncomely Catesqualli and the somewhat "deformed, unfinished" Screechvelli, and had (suppositiously) driven the antiquated and obese Sottovoce off the stage with his presence, might be gallant enough to remain in his tomb when he knew that he had to appear to a young and well-favoured little cantatrice.

Thus, for two or three days, I went about in a sort of nervous tremour and apprehension; and on the night of the performance, as I repaired to the theatre, I was quivering like an aspen leaf, and felt that for voice I had not a note in its whole compass which was not *tremoloso*.

But still, it surprised me that having "screwed my courage to the sticking-place," clothed myself in the rich and most becoming costume of the belle of the Capulets of Verona, and having on my entrance been greeted with enthusiastic applause by a crowded and critical audience, how my spirits rose to the occasion.

I was heart and soul in my rôle; the ghost was quite forgotten.

The opera proceeded, and at every scene of mine, success followed upon success.

At last the curtain fell amidst the loudest of *bravas* and clapping of hands; my recall twice, thrice, was insisted upon, and upon every *entrée* bouquets of the choicest flowers were showered upon me.

Moreover, the Prince Leandro d'Ellesponté came into the *salon*, offered me his warmest congratulations, and gave me this ring as a *souvenir* of the enjoyment I had afforded him.

Emanuel, of the Palais Royal, says that its diamonds are only paste. No matter; they sparkle, and look real at a distance.

Of course several times during the piece I had to retire to my dressing-room to make alterations in my costume. On each occasion as I entered it was in terrible fear and trepidation, expecting to be greeted by the dreaded *Mercutio*; but as I saw nothing, I became more and more assured, and convinced myself that the ghost must have been purely imaginative, or that its counterfeiting was a secret and clever trick of stage machinists, done to keep up a time-honoured theatrical tradition.

When, as I said before, the whole thing was ended, I repaired once more to my apartment, to cast aside altogether stage habiliments, and to put on my own more homely and every-day attire.

This time the French dresser, Fifine, was with me, and I felt quite plucky and chivalrous as we passed along the *coulisses* and entered the room.

The gas had been lowered, and but the very tiniest of sparks glimmered in the lamp.

The candles also on the dressing-table had been extinguished, so that almost complete darkness reigned around.

"*Ma foi!*" exclaimed the woman; "the manager is stingy indeed! Hardly half an hour are you, mademoiselle, out of this musty old room for the tomb scene on the stage, and down goes the gas to the fraction of an inch, and out go the *bougies* altogether. Bah! a gallant French director would have had the *maudit* hole made brilliant for your comfort, with, perhaps, a flask of champagne and a delicate morsel laid out for your refection. *Bête!* but I'll have the lights up very soon, and ruin him in gas!"

As she spoke she turned up the taps of the gaselier, and in one second the whole place was thrown into brightness and glare.

"Fifine—Fifine, look there—there!" I gasped out.

"Where, my lady?—where? How you scare my wits out with your frightened air! Where? I see nothing."

"There, I tell you—there!"

"*Bon Dieu*, I look here, there, everywhere, but I observe nothing."

"No? There—on the sofa—there!"

Seated on that couch, his head resting on his arm, was the figure of a young man in the costume of *Mercutio*, with slashed doublet, hose, bonnet, and plume, and the empty scabbard of a sword belted by his side.

His face was calm; every feature of it placid, but wearing, oh, so sad and melancholic an expression! I can never forget that look so long as I live!

Although my eyes dwelt but for an instant upon the form, yet every lineament, every line, every curve of it was graven upon my brain as if by magic. I could sketch it now as well as if it were on that settee in this room before me.

Seemingly as if it but waited my coming, the figure rose and stood before me. Then it pointed with its right hand towards the stage, slowly shook its head, and vanished.

"Fifine, Fifine, it is gone!" I cried; and then I rushed out, I know not where.

* * * * *

I was forced to throw up the rest of my engagement with Costa-Monga, and go into retirement at Nice, Mentone, and other places, until my nerves had recovered from the shock they had received.

Afterwards I slipped over to the United States, and the practical matter-of-fact Yankees soon dispelled the illusion—if it were illusion—but to which idea I distinctly say *no*.

Then I returned home, and resumed my professional career, having, as you know, been pretty busy and pretty successful in it.

"Yes, Signorina. Witness last night's *furor* at Covent Garden in your personification of *Rosina* in "*Il Barbiere*."

"True, my friend; but whether I rise still higher in my noble and beloved art, or whether I sink to the level of the music-hall, or *café chantant*, never again, believe me, will a single passage of Bellini's "*I Montecchi e I Capuletti*" pass my lips. *Mercutio's* spirit haunts every bar of it."

III.

THE QUADROON NURSE'S STORY.

"JIST nodder piece of Massa 'Arry's imperance. Tinks—he do, 'cause he sojer ossifer and wear red coat—he can do what him please. Hi, my king! I make him know, *otreey cotreey*, as Martinique peoples say. And you, sar, I 'peaking to; for wharra you takes de—de liberty ob coming

here widout introduce, and boddering most respectable quadroon lady like me wid your question 'bout ghost story? 'Cause dat piccaninnee 'Arry, who is your brudder ossifer in de Dirty-Second, say you go up to Reculber estate in de Saint 'Lizabeth mountain ob dis Jamaikee, and hab talkee talkee wid Araminta Diana, my ole nuss; she can tell you first-rate story 'bout one duppy (ghost) she see wid her own two eye. And 'cause dat leelie-leelie boy tell you go, and you comes, why for I to make fool ob myself, for you and your mess to laugh? No, sar; nebber! I not going to do any ting ob de kind; I not tell one single, single word ob any story—and I bids you good morning, sar!"

"But, Araminta——" I exclaim.

"Well, by Job! I nebber in all my born days hear such presumpting! Araminta, indeed! I gives you to understand, sar, dat when you 'dress lady ob colour ob my style, you please 'dress her not like one fish-fag-ordinary-Kingston nigger gal. My name, sar, is Miss Araminta Diana Smit'; and again I 'as de honor to wish you ajew!"

"But Miss Araminta Diana Smith, pre-adamite spinster," I said—the word "pre-adamite" tickled her fancy, as I was sure it would. She had not the least conception what it meant, and took it for a pretty compliment—"Harry sent me all the way from Up-Park Camp to gather your narrative from your own lips, 'for,' said he, 'although I could tell you the outline, there is no one can relate the particulars so well or so correctly as the senile, garrulous, and grandiloquent harridan'"—again the long words pleased her, and she smirked and smiled as I repeated them—"up at Reculvers; therefore, old man, journey there, and hear them.' And—I'd nearly forgotten it in the pleasure of seeing you—he sent you this dollar as a Christmas-box, to which do permit me adding another on my own account."

"You're berry good, sar, and so is my child 'Arry. Ah, well, considering de business a second time, and wid dese two dollar pieces in me hand, I tink—yes, I tink I will 'me round and varnish tale re-libber,' as I once heard a play-actor say in de Kingston Teater."

And then the old nurse told me the following story, but which, for the sake of more facile recounting, I shall transpose from her somewhat unintelligible tongue into plainer English, giving only now and again, by way of polish, words or sentences of her negro jargon:—

In the good old West Indian time (said

she), when Mr. Bordmann owned this sugar estate, that was indeed the happy generation in which we negroes enjoyed ourselves—slaves though we were called. Plenty of good things to eat, especially we girls of the household; mountain mullet, ring-tail pigeons, black crabs, pepper-pot, and all such delicacies left from the “great house” table; sangaree, rum-punch, tamarrind-water, lemonade always on sideboards in the verandah for a sip or a “long drink,” thirsty or not; good clothes and finery upon our backs, and last, though not least, *bushas* (overseers) and book-keepers to flirt with.

Well, in those prosperous days, Mr. Bordmann, his wife, and Miss Bella, their daughter, lived on the estate, and in this very house.

Old master, as we used to call him, was one of the very best of the many good slave-owners on the island.

The driver's whip for the backs of his negroes was a thing unknown; bilboes and black holes were punishments unheard of. There was plenty of work, of course, especially in crop time; but it was done with merriment and song, and from conch-shell blowing at night to “knock off” until conch-shell blowing in the morning to “turn to,” there were the clean, cozy huts to go into for rest and comfort.

As for master selling a slave to a brother planter, he would just as soon have sold one to a certain person whose name I won't mention, for the good gentleman looked upon us all as entrusted to him by Providence. Besides this, he had plenty of doubloons, and never needed money, which need has often been the inevitable cause of a good master parting with a good slave.

Mistress Bordmann was her husband's very counterpart in kindness, and as for Miss Bella, why she and many a little negro girl had run about, played, and, so to say, been brought up together. It did her no harm; it did us much good, especially myself, who was always her maid, and at the date of my story, her nurse.

A regular creole belle, my Bella, I can tell you; and merchants, lawyers, island curates, doctors, officers, all sorts and conditions of men used to be always coming here and dangling after her; so that old master once said, “What a lot of young chaps, Araminta, are constantly at my door, wanting and waiting to ring my Bell;” but as no entrance into the “great house” had a bell, and visitors when they came to see us shouted “Boy!” I never could understand what funny old master meant.

Now, there was an officer of one of the

West India regiments—the soldiers were not dressed like Jewhalves (the worthy Araminta Diana meant to say Zouaves) then as now—used to be always riding from Kingston, Port Royal, Fort Augusta, from every barrack, indeed, where he happened to be, and could get away to Reculvers to spend his time with us.

He was accustomed to excuse his comings by saying that our place was so lovely, the air so pure, nature so enticing, master and mistress's society so charming, that he could not help running off from the heat, sand, and miseries of the lowlands whenever he could.

But he was fibbing, that Captain Clarkson was. Miss Bella was his sole attraction (the nurse said “abstraction,” but let that pass), and if she had been in the worst and most fever-stricken hole in all Jamaica, he would have been there all the same.

One time I oberhear ole massa say to Miss Bella somet'ing 'bout Jack Clarkson and spoons, making illusion to dat ossifer; but afterwards I whispers to my child, “Your fader quite wrong, missie; one fine sojer gentleman like dat can't possible want tief (steal) spoon—nebber. I too much feel shame your fader to t'ink so.” And Miss Bella laugh ready to die; why for, I not know. 'Nodder time I see Miss Bella cut off leelie, leelie lock ob her beautiful hair, and gib it to de captain; and den, when I get de chance, I say, “Yes, sar; de 'air is berry pure. I washes and curls it ebery morning wid my own hands. De face, not de place, is berry lovely. I hab known it from baby almost; and de society is 'ticing, I grants. Oh, I can see, sar, into rocky-stone wall as far as any odder quad-roon gal.” And den he, too, laff, and gib me one dollar.

Law! me garra! he was, if you b'lieve me, sar, handsome buccra, dat Jack Clarkson, 'Squire.

Tall and big, like Blue Mountain Peak; eyes black as skin of ripe star-apple; whisker yellow and stiff as stalk of bamboo bush; lips red, like cherrymoya berry; teet so much white as pulp of kenip fruit; breat (breath)—Miss Bella say, smell like Jamaikiee jasmine; but once, when he gib me sly kiss, and say, “Araminta, you beauty, pass dat on to missie,” I perceibe to smell more of Jamaikiee rum mixed wid Habanna seegar.

As for him palaver—him tongue run nineteen to de dozen, and smooed, like de water ob de Rio Cobre in de dry wedder.

Well, after some time of gallivanting and love-making, things came to a crisis.

The captain proposed, young missie

accepted, and papa, mamma, as well as I, agreed.

So everything was settled; the "true so" ordered, and Maria Vaz, the best cook in the country, requested to make the wedding cake.

Meantime, Mr and Mrs. Bordmann went to Spanish Town on some important business, leaving Bella here in my charge.

Captain Clarkson was now at Falmouth, on the north side of the island, one hundred and fifty miles away, and could not get to Reculvers on account of the distance. Indeed, it had been decided that he was not to make his appearance again at the estate until a few days before the marriage.

But if he in person did not come, his letters did every day—gilt-edged paper, sealed with rose-coloured wax, and a little spot of the same dropped on the back to represent a kiss; that was the fashion of the time.

One day, however, there came no epistle as usual from her sweetheart to Bella, nor the next, nor the next, nor the next; and the dear child began to get uneasy and to fret.

"Araminta," said she (Mr. and Mrs. Bordmann were still away), "I wonder why Jack does not write. Again to-day not a line: yesterday none; for four days none. I am very nervous and low, nurse dear, and these feelings are worked upon and increased by a presentiment that there is something wrong with my darling. Besides—you know how superstitious we creoles are,—two nights ago I fancied that I saw corpse-lights over the cane-field there; last night I heard the ticking of the death-watch; and just now, while I was sitting in the piazza, such a strange creepy feeling came suddenly over me, as if a cold blast of air had suddenly passed me. Jack must be ill, perhaps dying."

"Hi! my king! da warra dis, you stupid lub-sick gal, making all dis bodder 'bout noting! What in dis blessed world can be wrong? P'r'aps Capten Clarkson gone to Mentego Bay for order fine clodes for wedding; p'r'aps colonel send him wid sojers to Grand Camanas to guard some property from de wreckers; p'r'aps—p'r'aps—you make me quite rejected like, you do, wid your nonsense. Corpse-lights, pooh! More likely one blackgard tief wid lantern, tiefing canes! Death watch, chugh! Massa's big timepiece tick, tick, tick in him dressing-room! Creeps! De cold wind from de mountain pass, noting else! You go to bed, missie. Sleep it off; and to-morrow big, big letter come wid two, tree, five, six kiss inside and out!"

But, I assure you, sir, the words of my young mistress had made me most wretched; for although I had endeavoured to cheer her, I, too, felt a full conviction that something was amiss.

Miss Bella went up-stairs to her room, and cried herself to sleep.

I lay on a mat spread on the floor of the same apartment, and fell asleep, too.

About midnight her voice suddenly awoke me.

"Araminta—Araminta, what is that noise?"

I listened, and heard distinctly the heavy tread of a man coming slowly step by step up the wooden staircase, and at each of his footfalls the clank, clank, clank of a sword trailing after him.

"What can it be, Araminta?" said the poor frightened child. "For mercy's sake, get up and see!"

I lighted a candle and crept out.

Then I saw—but no, you won't believe me, though it is true, nevertheless—the figure of a white soldier, in full uniform, and with a sword at his side, ascending the stairs.

Without the least noise, now he came almost within touching distance of me.

My flesh crept; every hair of my head stood on end; a cold perspiration oozed from every pore; my teeth chattered; my tongue clove to my mouth; but yet somehow or other I managed to gasp out; though I knew I was addressing one from the grave, "Mr. Jack—Captain Clarkson!—why are you here? How did you come? What—what, oh, great goodness, is the matter?"

He made no answer—poor soul, how could he?—but he looked for a moment, oh, so lovingly, to the room where his betrothed was—and disappeared!

Then I shrieked out, and fell down in a faint.

When I recovered Bella was standing by my side.

"What is it, nurse? What has frightened you? What have you seen? Him?—him? Tell me at once! Oh, no, you need not! I know it! My darling, my beloved, my own—own Jack, my heart's sunshine! Oh, Merciful Father, he is dead—dead—dead!"

"Yes, my dearest, he must be, for I have seen his ghost."

Two days after (for, as you know, there were neither telegraphs, nor railways, nor even rapid postal communication in those Jamaica times) we learnt that Captain Clarkson had died from yellow fever, then prevailing in Falmouth.

Now, sar, you ab my story, and I takes my leabe.

OR RUNS YOUR MIND ON ANOTHER LOVE?

BY JESSIE MACLAREN.

CHAPTER I.

IN the soft, purple glow of a summer's evening, in an ancient cathedral town in France, a tall, handsome Englishman was enjoying his after-dinner cigar, as he sauntered leisurely past an old château in the suburbs.

With a cry of pain, a tiny dog fell from the balcony at his feet, and at the same moment an exclamation of distress was heard overhead.

Sir Clyffe Dashwood looked up.

The Countess Lucy looked down, stretching her slender white neck over the scarlet cushions, where she had been playing with her lap-dog when he fell.

As their eyes met, a mysterious chord of affinity seemed to stretch from heart to heart!

He gently lifted the injured animal, and carried it up the marble steps, just as the door was opened by a servant in green livery.

While the two men were examining Fido's injuries, the little creature's mistress came flying down the stairs to receive him, and to thank the stranger for his kindness.

If he thought the young lady pretty at a distance, she appeared simply adorable in proximity, with her deep, gray eyes, coral lips, rose-leaf complexion, and hair the exact shade of Beatrice Cenci's in her picture at Rome.

Presently the Countess De Belfort joined her daughter, thanked the stranger also, and courteously invited him to enter, saying, with a smile, "You don't recollect me, Sir Clyffe; but you once took me in to dinner at your cousin's house in Devonshire, when my late husband and I were in England three years ago."

Then he remembered; they shook hands heartily, and he remained to spend the most charming evening he ever enjoyed in his life.

While he and his hostess sat discussing mutual reminiscences, Lucy was up-stairs, arranging her unlucky pet for the night; and when she returned, they had coffee and music, of which latter Sir Clyffe was a professed amateur.

The young girl played delightfully upon the harp, and, at their guest's desire, sang some quaint old Provençal ballads in one of those rich soprano voices which make the hearers feel its possessor has passionate capabilities of joy and sorrow in her nature.

All too rapidly the evening flew past, and (almost to the Baronet's own astonishment) he promised, at parting, to do himself the pleasure of returning next afternoon.

A few hours had turned his plans upside down.

Yesterday he had as much intention of flying as of spending three days in a place at which he had merely stopped for a night, *en route* to Marseilles, where his yacht lay ready for a cruise in the Mediterranean.

Now he found it absolutely impossible to tear himself away.

That he should find Lucy captivating was only natural, for her sweet, unaffected simplicity could hardly prove less than refreshing to a man who, while not at all *blasé*, had yet lived much in society, and seen caps by the score "set" at him and his twenty-five thousand a year.

His age was thirty-nine, but he looked quite half a dozen years younger.

His wife had died three years before,

after a marriage the reverse of happy, although the fault was entirely hers.

A second cousin of his own by the female side, she was a portionless orphan, and, when making his proposal to her, he, out of pure kindness of heart, offered her step-sister also a home under his roof.

Gertrude, while younger than Lady Dashwood, was prettier, but at times very peculiar in her behaviour, although the eccentricities she indulged in often seemed as much the result of a love of fun as of anything else.

She was very fond of her brother-in-law, and occasionally, carried away by high spirits, flirted so absurdly with him that it was as good as a scene in a comedietta; for Sir Clyffe, considering a girl of sixteen a mere child, helped her to play at the game of coquetry, without for an instant thinking of anything but innocent amusement.

The elder sister was, however, of a different opinion. She became madly jealous—with that worst kind of jealousy which gathers force by remaining silent, till at last it bursts forth like a lava torrent, destroying all before it.

An accidental word of her sister, one morning, made Lady Dashwood lose her self-command, and insist that Gertrude should quit the house instantly, and for ever.

"But where can I go, Anna?" cried Gertrude, in despair, terrified at the other's sudden outbreak, and the blaze of her eyes—"where can I go? I have no home but this."

"To the parish workhouse, if you like!" hissed her sister between her teeth.

An ugly scene ensued—an almost incredible scene, if one did not know the lengths to which jealousy will urge an otherwise just woman; for, frenzied with rage, Lady Dashwood lifted her clenched hand, and struck the poor girl a violent blow.

The centre diamond of the elder sister's guard ring happened to be a very large one, faceted to a sharp projecting point; and had not Gertrude's thick curls providentially intervened, the blow on the head might have proved fatal.

While the two stood panting and glaring at each other, in came Sir Clyffe, to show his wife a fine sea-anemone he had just found on the beach.

Gertrude flew to him, trembling like a wounded bird, clinging to his neck, calling him by every endearing name she could think of, and then, from her place of safety, looking up saucily at her ladyship, called her a "jealous, spiteful woman!"

At that moment, Lady Dashwood certainly looked viciously at her supposed rival, who, still clinging to Sir Clyffe, trembled so violently that if he hadn't put his arm round her waist, she must have fallen to the ground.

Then, all at once, with a gasp and a gurgle in her throat, she was seized with what appeared to be a bad epileptic fit.

Consternation instantly cleared her sister's mental vision, and her heart smote her at sight of the helpless child, to whom she ought to have been a second mother.

A mounted groom was despatched for the old family doctor, Gertrude, meanwhile, groaning and writhing so violently that it took both her brother and his horrified wife to hold her on the sofa.

When Doctor Ellis arrived, he, after little more than a glance at his patent, begged that advice from London might be instantly telegraphed for.

This was done, and Sir Vivisect Brown came as fast as an express train could carry him.

All he did, however, was to endorse his *confrère's* opinion—that the young lady must always have been slightly insane, and that the present attack was simply what might have been expected to occur sooner or later. Had nothing happened to agitate her, the sad issue might possibly have been delayed, as a fire may smoulder till sent into flames by a puff of wind; but in any case, it was nothing but a question of time.

In the present instance, the malady was hereditary; but not having attacked any branch of the family for a couple of generations, it had been supposed extinct.

It was a terrible shock to Lady Dashwood, filling her, as it did, with fears for her own sanity.

From that time she lived in a continual state of mental introspection, quite enough of itself to throw a stronger head than hers off its balance. The immediate result, however, was an immense improvement of her disposition.

Gertrude's affliction distressed Sir Clyffe likewise. Not only was his kindly heart wrung with pity for the pretty, playful, wilful child, but he felt uneasy on his own account; for, although the Dashwoods had always been what Americans term a "level-headed race," on the "*distaff* side of the house" he came of the same stock as his wife and her sister.

A cure of Gertrude's malady was not to be looked for; but after three or four months of medical treatment, the strong mania by degrees passed off, leaving her tolerably docile, though unable to recognise



"'BUT WHERE CAN I GO, ANNA?' CRIED GERTRUDE, IN DESPAIR." (See p. 96.)

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anyone, and filled with strange hallucinations and delusions.

Partly to keep the affair "quiet," and partly from a sort of remorseful care for her unfortunate sister, Lady Dashwood implored her husband, instead of following the physician's advice to send her to an asylum, to let her remain where she herself could personally superintend her treatment and comfort.

Clyffe Castle (the Baronet's residence) stood upon a high range of rock towering above one of the wildest coasts in England. In olden times the edifice had been much smaller and strongly fortified; but now-a-days the original portion occupied only one side of the quadrangle, which was surrounded on three sides by more modern architecture.

The ancient building was five hundred years old. It stood next the sea, and had walls six feet thick, which were in a good state of preservation.

Although unoccupied for more than a century, it was still habitable—so a comfortable suite of rooms was arranged there for the mad girl, and an experienced attendant placed over her.

Shortly afterwards, Lady Dashwood's health gave way, and she died, entreating her husband never to let poor Gertrude be removed from under his roof,

He promised.

CHAPTER II.

A FORTNIGHT had glided past, three weeks, a month, and still Sir Clyffe Dashwood was a daily visitor at the Château Belfort.

The crew of his yacht were grumbling at the idle life they led at Marseilles while awaiting either further orders or his appearance; but evening after evening saw him seated at Lucy's side in a wide balcony that overlooked the exquisite rose garden, murmuring low love tones in her ear, all his past grief and care forgotten in the witchery of her presence.

It did not need the gift of prophecy to foretell how all this would end; and the old Countess already in anticipation suffered the pain of parting from her only child. She was too devoted a mother to repine at the girl's approaching happiness.

At length there came a time when, with the rising moon silvering the tree-tops, and the diamond stars looking down from the deep blue sky like angel eyes, the lovers pledged their mutual faith, "come weal, come woe."

"My own, my very own!" he whispered, bending his stately head over the sweet face lying on his breast, "if I can help it, neither care nor sorrow shall ever approach you, and all your life shall glide away like a happy dream."

The troth-plight, so precious to Lucy and Sir Clyffe, was but bitter-sweet to the old Countess, who, however, smothered her regrets, and when the girl flung herself impulsively into her arms, soothed her emotion with the tenderest embraces.

The Baronet had mentioned the fact of his being a widower, but a sensation he could scarcely explain had made him refrain mentioning his unfortunate cousin-sister at Clyffe Castle.

That she was still there was certainly rather to his credit than otherwise. Yet he shrank nervously from bringing up the subject in this the most blissful moment it could ever be his to experience.

"It does not matter much, after all," he thought. "Another time will do equally well for explanations. A few hours cannot make any difference."

Next forenoon he repaired to the château, fully intending to tell about his poor sister-in-law, but found the household in a state of excitement, because Fido was supposed to be threatened with madness.

Sir Clyffe once more came to the rescue of Lucy's pet; and if anything could have heightened her adoration of the Englishman, this would have done it.

During lunch the conversation naturally turned upon Lucy's dog, and thence drifted to the various developments of insanity, *à propos* of which the old lady mentioned a case within her own knowledge that involved a tragic domestic romance, adding: "To me there is nothing so fearful as being in the remotest degree connected with madness. One can never tell how long it may lie dormant in a family, and then break out unexpectedly, as in the case of the unfortunate friend of whom we have been speaking. Poor darling Louise! It always makes my heart ache to think of her. She was such a lovely, sweet creature! Oh, how sad for her husband to have the wife he almost worshipped in a lunatic asylum, and their only child and heir a drivelling idiot!"

Sir Clyffe's heart stood still.

How could he now speak of Gertrude?

If he had taken the physician's advice years ago, and sent her to a private mad-house, there would have been no need for making her existence known. Nay, even yet, might it not be possible to make arrangements which, while securing the poor girl's comfort, should obviate the necessity for the painful disclosure he

dreaded? But on second thought he said, "No, no! The promise to my dying wife shall be kept, be the result what it may."

Nothing was farther from his intention than to deceive his youthful betrothed; but the family skeleton must remain locked up yet awhile, till a fitter opportunity for exposing it should present itself.

CHAPTER III.

"FAREWELL, my own, my dearest!" said Sir Clyffe, clasping Lucy to his heart. "Two short months, then I return to claim you, never to part again."

They were standing upon the doorsteps shortly after dawn.

The carriage was waiting to convey him to the railway station, and at that early hour nature looked fresh, and sweet, and dewy.

The rising sun burnished the gray cathedral spire with brilliant ruby, and the leaves of the poplars which lined the road to the Château Belfort looked limper, and moister, and greener than they would do a couple of hours later.

Not a soul appeared to be stirring save the little party at the hall-door.

The old Countess, in her lilac silk *peignoir* and tasteful head-gear of Indian muslin and Mechlin lace, looked the *grande dame*; while Lucy, attired in speckless white cambric, was the picture of purity and loveliness.

The travelling programme which Sir Clyffe intended to carry out when he quitted England had been entirely altered. Instead of cruising among the classic Greek islands, he was now going to Marseilles on purpose to send his yacht straight back to Southampton, while he proceeded homeward by the speediest route, to make arrangements at Castle Clyffe for his bride's reception in autumn, the time fixed for the wedding to take place.

"Farewell, my dear one!" he said, yet again. "You shall, without fail, hear from me daily. Heaven guard my treasure!"

"Adieu, *chérie*!" answered Lucy, lifting to his face her beautiful eyes, humid with the tears she strove to keep from falling, lest they should bring bad luck to her departing lover.

Charming and good though the little Countess was, she had her superstitions, and firmly believed that to weep when taking leave of one's betrothed would ensure a speedy quarrel.

As the carriage drove away with Sir Clyffe, Lucy's loving gaze was rivetted upon her future husband till a bend in the road

hid him from view, and she felt at that moment as if a dark cloud had suddenly dropped over the bright world, where hitherto all for her had been sunshine and joy.

Tears trickled slowly down her pretty, soft cheeks; then the pent-up shower forced its way, and flinging her arms round her mother's neck, she sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Come, come, my child," said the Countess, dropping a kiss upon the fair white brow; "you really must not give way like this. Two months will soon fly past; then you and Clyffe will never need to part again. Instead of shedding tears, my dear, we must think about your *trousseau*. Ah, my Lucy's dress shall be beautiful! Brussels lace over white satin would be prettiest, I think, for the wedding-gown; but I daresay, in the long run, we shall leave it for "Worth" to decide. His taste is always perfect."

Her daughter's bridal finery was not just then very interesting to Madame la Comtesse; but her kindly little *ruse* answered its purpose, and brought back smiles to Lucy's face.

Few young girls similarly circumstanced could have helped feeling interested in the discussion of silks and velvets, furs and jewels!

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN it became known in his native county that Sir Clyffe Dashwood was about to bring home a second bride nothing else was talked of.

He represented the eldest and wealthiest of its families; so "high and low" took an interest in his marriage, and aired their opinions freely. Some grudged the best match in the shire to a foreigner; while others, with a knowing look, trusted this matrimonial venture would turn out more happy than did his last.

To one individual—Lady Clare Eliot—the tidings came like a thunder-clap on a summer's day.

Her family and the Dashwoods had for generations been near neighbours and friends; and although Sir Clyffe was only a boy at Eton when she ran away, at sixteen, with a handsome *roué* captain of dragoons, there was scarcely a year's difference in their ages.

Some years ago, when she returned, an impecunious widow, upon the hands of her brother, Lord Marston, her old playfellow, Sir Clyffe, had just married, and almost as a matter of course, she became very intimate at the Castle.

She was a strikingly handsome woman, looking younger than her forty years, and had for the last eighteen months played her cards so cleverly that if Sir Clyffe had not chanced to stroll along that poplar-shaded road in the old French city, and if Lucy's lap-dog had not fallen over the balcony, she might, by-and-by, have succeeded in becoming the second Lady Dashwood.

Lord Marston, while allowing her the "run" of his house, was anything but an affectionate brother—though fine sympathies would probably have been wasted upon Lady Clare.

His lordship was a good-looking, agreeable person of forty-eight; popular in society, though understood not to be a marrying man.

His sister's life had neither been good nor happy; but of late she had been mentally promising to purify it when she became Lady Dashwood, being of Becky Sharp's opinion, that with a full purse virtue is not difficult to achieve. Yet, to give Lady Clare her due, she loved the Baronet for himself, irrespective of his fortune—loved him with the intensity which a coarse-minded, world-hardened woman is apt to cherish when her first real experience of the tender passion arrives late in life; for although Lady Clare had run away twenty-four years previously with the good-for-nothing officer whose name she bore, her affections were now for the first time seriously engaged.

From her extreme intimacy during her earliest widowhood with Sir Clyffe and his wife, she was aware of all the outs and ins of his domestic history, and in the event of certain contingencies knew he would find himself thoroughly in her power.

Meanwhile, her great aim was to hide her bitter disappointment both from him and her brother.

The latter, however, was not to be deceived, and laughed at her for an old fool, being himself one of those who consider age in women positively dishonourable.

As Sir Clyffe's nearest neighbours, the handsome widow and her brother were amongst the first to offer their congratulations, and when the happy *fiancée* asked Lord Marston to officiate as his groomsman he gladly consented.

Preparations for the bride's reception proceeded briskly. Cohorts of tradesmen were at work, and van after van came from London, laden with magnificent furniture, to be arranged under Sir Clyffe's directions, for he was determined neither to spare trouble nor expense to render her English home pleasant to his French bride.

The prettiest apartment was set aside as her dressing-room. It was hung with the palest of pink lutestring silk and fine guipure lace, which had been a century and a half in the family.

This room looked into a great paved quadrangle, in the middle of which stood a curious antique sun-dial, and where white pigeons could be seen flying round and round a quaint tower that served as a landmark on that part of the coast.

Among other improvements, Sir Clyffe had built a balcony at the dressing-room window, in exact imitation of the massive old-fashioned one at the Château Belfort, and so dear did it become from association that he sometimes used to fancy how he and Lucy would sit side by side and dream back the blissful time of their first acquaintance.

Looking from the balcony straight across the quadrangle the ancient part of the Castle met the eye, with its quaint ranges of tiny windows, nearly hidden under a wonderful growth of Irish ivy.

Night and day the swish, or guggle, or boom, or roar of the tide could be heard.

The tenantry on the Castle Clyffe estate got up a present for their future lady—a hand-mirror, framed with gold, and surrounded by a wealth of flowers, in rubies, pearls, and diamonds.

The stay-at-home farmers would never have thought of anything so artistic; only one of their daughters happened just then to return from a London boarding-school, and started the idea.

Sir Clyffe felt very much gratified; but Lady Clare was half-mad with spite, and would have given a good deal to ensure the bride's destruction.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN the wedding-day came to be fixed, it appeared that the elegant, dignified matron, as well as pretty Lucy, pinned her faith to provincial saws and legends.

Many were the consultations the two held regarding the days of the week; for Sir Clyffe had written to say that if the ceremony took place upon Friday, it would enable him to carry his bride to Venice, in time to assist at a certain triennial Festa which she had expressed a strong wish to see when he was at the Château Belfort.

Now, in common with most natives of their district, both ladies believed that weddings take place on

"Monday for wealth,
Tuesday for health,
Wednesday, the best day of all;
Thursday for crosses,
Friday for losses,
Saturday—no luck at all."

"The darling fellow!" said Lucy. "Just to think of recollecting even that passing wish of mine! I cannot disappoint him—can I, mamma?—for I feel quite sure he has already made arrangements to suit the time he speaks of. And yet if it were any other day of the week, I should run the risk. 'Crosses,' with him beside me, would be easily borne; but 'crosses,' and the loss of his love, perhaps—now, there, mamma, I dare not venture to name Friday!"

So Wednesday was substituted; and in due time the exultant bridegroom arrived, with Lord Marston.

Lucy and her lover found each other more charming than even memory painted; but his lordship was fairly amazed at the bride's grace and beauty, and thought his friend most fortunate to have discovered such a treasure.

She reminded him of a blush-rose with the dew still on it; of sunset among the Alps; of Claribel's bright, pathetic songs; of all things exquisite, and fragile, and tender.

Looking at her, he felt himself a forlorn old bachelor, and for once wished certain by-gones could return from the grave of the past.

He would have liked to do something desperate for her sake; and, oblivious of the fact that Lady Clare had not yet seen this vision of youth and loveliness, once more mentally called his sister an old fool for ever thinking of Sir Clyffe as a possible husband for herself.

Never was so beautiful a wedding seen in the old cathedral as Lucy's; and in her snowy robes, and the bridegroom's gift of diamonds, she resembled an exquisite vision rather than an ordinary creature of flesh and blood.

The party, although not large, numbered some of the oldest *noblesse* in France—nearly all relatives of the Belfort family.

The church was crowded in every corner, even the humblest peasant being anxious to see the last of their dear young lady, and catch a glimpse of "Sir *Dashwood*," as the local journals called him.

In conformity with custom, twelve young poor children walked two and two behind the *cortège* to the altar, and thence preceded the bride, strewing roses in her path: while the grand organ pealed the "Wedding March," and joyous carillons rang out from the ancient tower, the bells of which had in their time announced revolutions and all the horrors of bloody war.

It goes without saying that the *déjeuner* was perfect; and Lucy duly cut the cake—

that curious Christian survival of the ancient heathen usage of brides sacrificing cakes to Diana.

With tears running down her sweet face, Lady Dashwood took leave of the Countess, who felt heartbroken, but would have almost suffered anything rather than distress her child by showing how deeply she mourned her loss.

"Now, mother," said Sir Clyffe, embracing the Countess affectionately, "recollect we hope very soon to welcome you to our home, which will always be happier for us when you are there."

The chariot waiting for the newly-married pair was bright orange, with six gray horses and three green-jacketed postillions, in high boots and cocked hats.

Sir Clyffe's valet and Lucy's maid occupied the rumble; but the former turned up his nose at what he considered a want of style in the whole affair.

The related dukes and duchesses, and counts and countesses, launched from the doorsteps a volley of satin slippers, and rice, and roses, and "*bon voyages*," and "God bless you's" after the travellers; and then, the excitement being over, the old Countess gave her heart leave to ache till the tears came; while Lord Marston suddenly felt everything so weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable, that nothing but civility kept him from starting for England without an hour's delay.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER a short but delightful tour in Italy and Switzerland, the happy couple arrived at Clyffe Castle in one of the finest Octobers that had been seen for years.

The bride's grace and beauty created quite a *furor* in the county, and the slight quaintness of her mode of speech rather increased than otherwise the spell of her fascination; for, although a fairly good English scholar, Lucy's idiom and accent were unquestionably foreign.

Sir Clyffe was, if possible, more devoted than ever, and accidentally discovered, one day, that in Lucy's favourite dress of bronze-green velvet, she bore a striking resemblance to his celebrated French ancestress, Lady Mabel Dashwood, whose portrait hung in the great gallery, and who was considered the most beautiful woman in England, being named by the Court gallants "*La belle des belles*."

Lord Marston and his sister were very intimate at the Castle, the former, in spite of his anti-matrimonial proclivities, being too ardent an admirer of beauty not to enjoy keenly the society of the only woman

he had ever seen who came up to his ideal.

Lady Clare constituted herself a sort of gratuitous *chaperon* to the youthful *châtelaine*, and earned the girl's gratitude by initiating her into various little points of English etiquette.

Her ladyship still craved for Sir Clyffe's society, as a drunkard thirsts for alcohol, yet hated him because he loved his wife, and thought of herself simply as an early friend.

She was quite convinced this was the light in which he now regarded her, although four months ago it appeared more than likely he would offer her his hand.

When she reflected how near the cup was to her lips when dashed away by the beautiful young French Countess, she became almost mad; and if evil wishes could have brought woe to Lucy, her present happiness wouldn't have been worth five minutes' purchase.

Lady Clare, however, was not fool enough to show hatred openly, but acted the family friend, and gradually insinuated herself into the confidence of both husband and wife.

Not that they made as yet a *confidante* of anybody; but should either ever find it necessary to consult a third party, it would be to her they would instinctively turn.

The only tiny cloud upon the clear horizon of the Baronet's wedded bliss was the fact that no opportunity had turned up for telling his wife about the unfortunate girl secluded within the ivy-clad walls which she so often admired from the dressing-room window.

Once and again, when he tried to lead up to the subject, Lucy inadvertently gave expression to opinions which had the effect of stopping him short.

He fervently wished he had had the moral courage to make a clean breast at the Château Belfort.

Looking back, it seemed such an easy thing to have spoken *then*, that *now* he could not understand why he had not done so.

But, in the intervening months, he had pondered over the matter till the original mole-hill had grown as big as a mountain, while his sensitive imagination brought him in guilty of deception as well as concealment—not wilful deceit, but a dishonourable distrust of Lucy's reliance upon his good faith.

"How could I be so cowardly," he said to himself, "as to presume to marry my darling without making her fully aware that my cousin being insane, madness

may some day be my doom also? Why shouldn't it? Madness is a hereditary curse, and may seize its victim when least expected."

As time ran on, this idea, once started, increased in strength, and he got into a habit of introspecting his mental condition, and reading medical works upon brain disease.

Nay, but for the fear of his forebodings being professionally corroborated, he would have run up to town, and laid his case before a physician.

Still, in spite of the uncomfortable hours all this gave him, his incubus often relaxed its hold, and left him free to confess himself happy in Lucy's love.

CHAPTER VII.

It was very unusual for Lord Marston to sojourn at his mansion at Dane Rock during the winter months; but that season he preferred staying till after Christmas.

The intimacy between the two families had steadily increased since Lucy's first arrival, two months before, and scarcely a day now passed without mutual intercourse in the way of boating, walks, drives, or rides.

Although it was the last week of November, the weather felt delightfully mild and balmy, proving the truth of what Gilbert White remarks in his much-quoted "History of Selborne,"—viz., "That November is the only month in England when the atmosphere occasionally has the soothing, bracing feel of Italian air."

A favourite walk of the four friends was a wild, romantic path, which ran along the cliffs for a mile and a half between the Castle and Lord Marston's grounds.

It was an exquisite road, now dipping betwixt steep crags, now meandering round tiny fairy-like dells, green even at that season, and gay with sea-pinks, and anon skirting along the ridge of rocky heights that stretched down a hundred and sixty feet into the blue-green waters which lapped their base.

From the elevated situation of the pedestrians the view was glorious. Though it consisted only of the open sea and an occasional sail, yet the beholder felt inspired with a boundless sense of freedom, and as far removed from every-day associations as if he had eaten of the fabled lotus-leaf.

As the footpath was too narrow for two to walk abreast, it frequently happened that Lord Marston and Lucy went Indian file, while Lady Clare and Sir Clyffe pro-

ceeded in the same fashion at some distance, the inequalities of the road being such, in fact, that one couple of pedestrians sometimes never set eyes on the other till near their journey's end.

Lord Marston had resided so much abroad that Lucy really enjoyed his company, for he spoke her native language remarkably well, and was a first-rate storyteller.

The other pair were often less happily engaged during their walks.

His cunning companion even wormed from Sir Clyffe the details of the secret distress which was preying on his mind, and of course she already knew most of the facts of Gertrude's sad story.

Having once aired his trouble, it became an unspeakable relief to talk it over, so he began to seek the widow for that purpose, walking ahead with her or lingering behind more frequently than his wife thought necessary.

Even Lord Marston observed it, and although gratified by pretty, innocent Lady Dashwood's evident enjoyment of his own racy conversation, felt disgusted with Sir Clyffe and Lady Clare, the latter of whom he considered, to quote his mental comment, "as clever and unscrupulous as the very devil himself."

"Dashwood is a greater ass than I took him for," he soliloquized, "to tire already of such an angel as his wife, and go flirting with an old woman of forty, whom he might have had for the asking, and who isn't much good, my sister though she be. Dear me! who would have predicted such a sad fate for this little darling? I wish I could help her in any way, poor child! If it would be of the slightest use, I'd even make a martyr of myself by taking Clare away for a few weeks. 'Out of sight, out of mind.' But, good gracious! what does he see in her at this time of day, when for the last two years she has been moving heaven and earth to 'hook' him, too?"

* * * * *

"Certainly not," said Lady Clare, as she and Sir Clyffe rested a few minutes at the most elevated spot of the rock-path, with the crimson glow of the early winter sunset falling over them, and forming a glittering bridge across the calm sea at their feet—"certainly not, if you ask my advice. She is a mere child, and might take all sorts of unreasonable notions into her head if you told her poor mad Gertrude is living under the same roof—especially as, from what you say, she has a nervous terror of insanity. I should let things be as they are, were I you."

"But it looks so horribly deceitful; it makes me absolutely hate myself—and she is so true and single-hearted."

"Oh, that's of course; but are you sure that at her age she can have the solid affection for a man of thirty-nine which would make her cleave to him if informed there was a possibility of his becoming mad some time or other? Remember, I do not take this view of the case; but it is what you would have to tell Lady Dashwood if you mentioned Gertrude at all. As she has such a childish dread of lunatics, don't you think, for her sake, as well as your own, it would be wiser to say nothing?"

"But couldn't you give her some sort of a slight hint about Gertrude which might pave the way for a full disclosure?"

"Well, I don't know. If I can, I shall."

"Thanks, dear old friend; you will make me your debtor for life."

CHAPTER VIII.

"BUT you don't mean to say you are so simple as to imagine your husband has told you all the outs and ins of his life? Bless you, child, Englishmen don't carry their hearts on their sleeves like your countrymen. They are naturally reticent, and—and—why, the spiciest of Sir Clyffe's experiences were over before you were born. Ah! those old days—the dear old days, when the heart was at its best, and life ecstatic, as it never is after five-and-twenty. Heigho! I'm sure it would be a blessing if one could forget sometimes."

It was Lady Clare who spoke.

She was taking afternoon-tea with Lucy, and the conversation, starting with certain current reports about a neighbouring squire, had drifted to the discussion of husbands in general and Sir Clyffe in particular.

"I am quite certain," replied Lady Dashwood, "that Clyffe never in all his life did anything to be ashamed of, and equally sure he never would keep a secret from me."

"Oh, I don't mean to infer he is worse than many others—my own brother, for instance; but, then, he never means to marry. Sir Clyffe, however, was so suddenly smitten with your pretty little face that—well, well, all I can say is that I have always stood up for him through thick and thin; and, by the bye, since we are on the topic, let me assure you, dear, that whatever people choose to report, it is not true that I refused your husband twice. Now, like a good little girl, just take my advice,

'Enjoy life and all the good things you have without diving below the surface.' No man, I should think, could be otherwise than proud of such a pretty little wife so very much younger than himself."

Loving her husband with an affection that never would change, Lucy was none the less wretched without anything tangible to found her misery upon.

She hated herself for fancying him more reserved than formerly and less devoted.

He and Lady Clare had of late been oftener than ever together, and the perplexed young foreigner drew unfavourable comparisons between her sad, shrinking little self and the brilliant, handsome woman of the world, at the very sight of whom Sir Clyffe's countenance lightened.

Excessively annoyed at the aspect of affairs, yet helpless to interfere, Lord Marston made himself as amusing as possible, by way of raising the ill-used wife's spirits, which conduct, thanks to Lady Clare's knowing glances, made Sir Clyffe so jealous that for an instant he really doubted Lucy's perfect loyalty, but, in short, the man was miserable.

The Countess De Belfort was to have spent Christmas with her daughter, but was detained at home by the arrival of her only brother on sick leave from Algeria.

While privately shedding tears over the disappointment, Lucy yet thanked Heaven for preventing her mother from coming to see what could not but grieve her.

Sir Clyffe hailed her absence as a respite.

Lady Clare, so far from being mollified by the distress she had caused, hated Lucy more and more.

So the year drew to a close.

CHAPTER IX.

It had for centuries been a custom of the head of the Dashwood family to give a grand ball at the Castle on the first New Year's Eve after his marriage; and in accordance with this tradition, Sir Clyffe and his wife had sent out invitations—the exigencies of position sometimes oblige people to make merry in spite even of aching hearts.

Above three hundred guests were expected, and great preparations were in progress.

By way of novelty, the old French fashion of "costume dances" was to be revived.

Solomon tells us there is nothing new under the sun; and here was immense excitement caused in an English county by the anticipation of performances which a

hundred and fifty years ago were getting out of date across the Channel.

The Castle was full of visitors staying for the whole Christmas week.

The handsome host and beautiful hostess, whom all fancied at the pinnacle of happiness, were simply miserable.

Loving each other sincerely, the breach between them was slowly but surely widening. The tiny streamlet which began to separate them two months before had broadened into a river too great for reaching across. So, with yearning hearts and wistful eyes, they gazed in dumb despair.

A word might have set everything right; but Lady Clare had adjured them individually—each for the other's sake, as well as for prudential motives—to keep silence, and make no sign.

Among the costume dances being got up was one which used to be in vogue at the Court of the "Grand Monarque," called "*La Danse des Quatre Saisons*."

The youthful hostess was to personate "Spring," Lady Clare "Summer," and a couple of Guards' officers, "Autumn" and "Winter."

After several rehearsals, it was arranged to have a full-dress one the evening before the ball.

Lady Clare, as "Summer," looked magnificent in a turquoise blue Genoa velvet gown, the corsage and train of which was trimmed with large, very dark crimson roses, matching those in her hair. A Paris diamond sparkled in the heart of each flower, and in the widow's exquisitely-formed hand she held a rarely beautiful fan of marabouts and pale blue crape, that looked like a floating cloudlet as she waved it gracefully to and fro.

Everybody admired her, and even Sir Clyffe—his heavy heart notwithstanding—was struck by the splendour of her appearance, which, being observed by his wife, filled her with dismay.

Lucy's dress, in her character of "Spring," was as simple as becoming. A robe of light silver tissue, scattered over with some of the same snowdrops of which her wreath was composed—that was all. Not a single jewel; but Flora herself might have been proud of her representative.

The proper "figures" were gone through with satisfaction and applause.

The last was a kind of *galop*, in which "Spring" had to bound lightly forward, followed by the other three seasons, who presently joined her in a "*Chaine des Dames*."

Just as, in the excitement of the moment, Lucy forgot her sorrows for an instant,

the garland in her hair was accidentally caught by a glittering bracelet on the arm of "Summer," and before she could save it, fell to the ground, and was trampled upon by Lady Clare.

The young *châtelaine* shivered.

Her heart stood still. How could a worse omen possibly befall?

In her recent unhappiness the superstitions of her childhood had resumed their old hold over her mind.

By this time it was the hour for chamber candles and "good nights," so the large, merry party presently dispersed.

Dismissing her maid earlier than usual, Lucy sat down at her dressing-room fire to think over her position as calmly as she could.

It was a clear, cold, moon-shiny night, silent, except for the swish of the waves; and as midnight struck upon the great clock over the stables, the sounds seemed to vibrate like living things in the frosty air.

Full of good resolutions, Lady Dashwood rose, but just after extinguishing her lamp, she drew up the blind, and stood a minute or two at the window, admiring the silvery sheen of the ivy upon the old walls opposite.

When in the act of turning away, but still gazing in the same direction, with a start, she observed two persons emerge from the uninhabited building—apparently in earnest conversation—now stopping, then walking a step or two; then standing again.

It was a man and a woman; the latter, with a shawl over her head and shoulders; the former, a tall, stately individual, in a slouched hat and plaid.

Their shadows fell across the court like long bars of jet upon a silver-grey ground.

In spite of the roll of the advancing tide, Lucy fancied she could hear her heart beat.

The fire in her room was extinguished; so shrinking behind the lace window-curtain, her presence became invisible from without.

Presently the muffled female, with what appeared to be a whispered "Good night," glided back to where she came from.

The man, crossing the quadrangle, kept near one side, as if afraid of being seen.

He glanced up at the balcony. In the bright moonlight every feature was as plain as if it were noonday.

It was her husband!

CHAPTER X.

THE ball attracted a brilliant assemblage of rank and beauty and fashion, but the

youthful hostess was voted the belle of the evening.

When Sir Clyffe saw her waltzing with Lord Marston his eyes grew misty.

Never had she seemed so lovely, and sweet, and pure.

Never had his heart yearned so painfully for reconciliation.

Lady Clare, suave and graceful, advanced towards him like the serpent in Paradise.

Playfully tapping his arm, and slightly shrugging her shoulders, she glanced meaningly at Lord Marston and his beautiful partner.

Sir Clyffe's countenance clouded while she engaged him in what appeared an engrossing conversation, and instead of again looking in the dancers' direction, he sat down facing Lady Clare, with his back to the company.

Noticing this, and filled with chivalrous compassion for the neglected girl-wife, Lord Marston mentally cursed his sister for a mischief-maker, and Sir Clyffe for a "deluded, unprincipled ass."

Waltzing in his lordship's arms to the tune of the "Blue Danube," Lucy very nearly forgot her dignity so far as to burst out crying at Sir Clyffe's avoidance of her society, and open preference for the handsome widow.

"Oh, why," she thought, "did he pick up Fido, and be so kind to my pet? If he hadn't, I should never have known him, and he would have married Lady Clare. I wonder why he didn't, since they seem so devoted to each other."

Then Lucy's thoughts reverted to what had more than once puzzled her—viz., what Lady Clare could mean by hinting that Sir Clyffe had secrets he never would tell his wife?

"Shall we take a turn through the conservatory?" asked Lord Marston, when the dance was finished. "Don't you find it very warm here?"

"Yes; do let us go!" assented Lady Dashwood, who had observed her husband disappear with Lady Clare upon his arm.

* * * * *
Strolling along a corridor, Lord Marston and Lucy came unexpectedly upon the widow and Sir Clyffe in a sort of extempore bower, formed by clumping quantities of magnificent Cape heaths and Australian ferns.

The floor was so thickly matted footsteps were inaudible.

The Baronet's back was towards his wife and her partner. His face was turned towards Lady Clare, whose eyes were cast down, as she tried to rectify something

that had gone wrong with one of the spokes of her fan.

A saucy smile played upon her full red lips, and, to do her justice, she looked supremely handsome.

"But," she was saying, "only imagine the gossip it would cause if——"

"I am past caring for that. Away she must go. Of course I am sorry for the poor girl; but——"

Lucy dragged her companion silently by the arm.

"Will you kindly," she said, "take me to the west wing. If anybody remarks my absence, say, please, that I was very tired, and have gone to my own apartments."

What could he do to help the poor ill-used little foreigner?

His sister, besides being utterly fearless, was old enough to take care of herself, and only two days before had laughed heartily when he objected to her conduct—cleverly turning the tables by taunting him with showing so much attention to Lady Dashwood.

Without a word, he politely and kindly led Lucy away.

She trembled so violently that, but for the support of his arm, she would have dropped.

The simple integrity of her character inspired him with more chivalrous respect than he ever felt for a woman before.

Fortunately they reached the door of her room unnoticed; and feeling that words of condolence would almost be adding insult to injury, with a polite bow, Lord Marston left her.

Alone in her dressing-room, the wretched girl fell on her knees.

Her conflicting emotions were too strong for articulate speech, as, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, she gazed upward.

The tide was full, and a solemn, murmuring monotone sounded from the mighty waters as they washed up against the rocks; while, mingling with this, came the strains of the band from the ball-room.

She rose from her knees, looking like a wandering angel in her glistening silver robe.

The door opened, and in glided so strange a visitor, that, never doubting it was a spirit, she shivered with terror.

It was a girl; deathly pale, with large, bright blue eyes and clouds of beautiful pale gold hair falling as low as her ankles.

She wore a curious short-sleeved robe, of pale sea-green taffetas, and scarlet morocco shoes.

"Who are you?" she said, addressing Lucy, in a soft, low voice.

"*Va t'en, Satan,*" gasped poor Lady Dashwood, launching the formula against ghosts taught her long ago by old Nannie, and cowering backward till stopped by the wall. "*Va-t'en—Va-t'en.*"

"*Va-t'en?*" Well, that is certainly a droll name. Mine is Lady Dashwood, and this is my husband's house! My own rooms are over at the other side of the court. Clyffe thinks it safer for me to live there, as there's another woman pretends *she* is his wife, and is so jealous, she might murder me! Only fancy! he is obliged to come and visit me hiddenly, poor fellow, for fear of her, although I am his *real* wife, and this is our own castle! Will you come and see my rooms some day? They are so pretty; and my husband brings me such nice ornaments when he goes from home. He brought me a pair of lovely hand-screens from France when he was there, not long since. Ah, he is such a darling, and so tall and handsome, and he loves me better than all the world beside! Have you a husband?"

"Mercy on us!" cried Gertrude's attendant, entering hurriedly; "how, in the name of wonder, did you escape? Come along with me this instant!"

"Indeed, I shall do nothing of the kind; I am waiting for my husband."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the woman, now, for the first time, observing Lucy stretched senseless on the floor, but afraid to leave hold of Gertrude either to assist Lady Dashwood or to summon aid. "My lady!—my lady!" she cried, loudly, tightening her grasp of her charge, for fear she should make off to the festive scene she herself had been taking a sly peep at, and, in her anxiety to see which, she forgot to turn the key of the insane girl's door.

"My lady!—my lady!" she again shouted.

"Oh, that's *va t'en,*" said Gertrude, glancing at Lucy's recumbent figure, and struggling to free herself from Mrs. Andrews' firm grip. "If you don't leave hold of me, I shall scream till Clyffe comes." And, with that, she began shrieking so violently as to bring the housekeeper and Lucy's maid as fast as they could hurry; and while they endeavoured to revive their mistress, Gertrude's attendant took her away.

Meanwhile, Sir Clyffe had been summoned, and was almost frantic at the sight of his wife, apparently dead, on the floor.

In a passion of tender remorse, he flung himself on his knees beside her, calling her by every endearing name in love's vocabulary.

With a feeble, tremulous sigh, that was half a sob, she opened her eyes.

"My own!" he exclaimed, joyfully, with his face bent over hers. "Thank Heaven, you are better!"

"Clyffe, dear," she whispered, in feeble accents, "please send me home to mamma. It will be best; I shall no longer be in your way, or—or—hers."

Her eyes closed again, tears forcing themselves through the thick, long lashes, and her breast heaving with emotion.

"What do you mean, my dearest? Send you away?"

The housekeeper, at this moment, prudently signalled to Lucy's maid; and after laying their lady upon the couch, they left the room.

"Yes, Clyffe," said Lady Dashwood to her husband, who has one of his arms under her head, and one of her hands in his; "I had much better go at once. *She* said I was mad with jealousy. Oh, why did you marry me?"

"Because I love you more than my life, my sweetest and best."

"But *she* says I am not your wife."

"*She*?—who? What on earth do you mean?" he cried, dreadfully alarmed; for just for an instant it suddenly flashed upon him that at last the dreaded doom was on him, and that his mind had given way, making him imagine Lucy was giving utterances to things she was not actually saying.

He flew to the bell, then to the door.

Luckily, the housekeeper was within call, and came directly.

"Who has been frightening my wife, Ellis?" he said, excitedly.

"Indeed, Sir Clyffe, it's no wonder her ladyship was scared at meeting poor Miss Gertrude in this very room, insisting—as her way is, poor thing—that she is Lady Dashwood. It was enough to terrify any young lady, much less a lady as is far from her own people and country."

"Gertrude here! Where was Mrs. Andrews?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I'm afraid she forgot to double-lock the door when she came to the steward's room to get her glass of mulled port along with the rest of the servants. It is New Year's Eve, Sir Clyffe, and that doesn't happen every day—but it was a thousand pities!"

In five minutes all was explained, and Lucy learnt that her husband's insane relative not only fancied herself Lady Dashwood, but imagined her sister still in life and as jealous as when she struck the blow which was the proximate cause of the poor girl's madness.

To rake up these odious details was very painful, but Sir Clyffe held nothing back, feeling he owed it to his wife to lay the case before her just as it stood.

"But, dearest husband," she said, with her arms round his neck and tears of joy in her eyes, "how could you imagine anything could change my affection? No possible calamity could do that. Even if you should lose your reason, it would make no difference. You still would be your own dear self to me. So far from feeling ashamed to tell me about that unfortunate girl, you might glory in your noble generosity. I am proud of you—at any rate, I don't believe there's another man in the world who would have acted so considerately. Ah, dear, you and I, who are so loaded with blessings, must try to alleviate Gertrude's sad fate. How pretty she must have once been, poor thing!"

"But are you quite sure you are able, Lucy?"

"Quite, dear," she answered, with a glad, low, rippling laugh, like a brook singing over its pebbly bed. "My heart is so light, I feel strong enough for anything. How long have we?"

"Exactly ten minutes," he said, looking at his watch. "In ten minutes another year will begin."

"Well, dear, ring for Sophie. I shall manage to be ready to go with you to the ball-room before the end of this good old year, which has been so eventful for us."

"Sophie," said her mistress, when the maid appeared, "I feel so well that my husband and I are going to join our friends before twelve strikes. What shall I wear? I have only a few minutes, and this poor silver tissue has come to grief."

After a cursory inspection of the wardrobe, the *femme de chambre* pitched upon her lady's wedding-gown as fittest for the occasion, and proceeded to array her in it, declaring she looked, if possible, more *ravissante* than the first time it was worn.

When Sir Clyffe rejoined his wife after her hurried toilet, he thought her looking just as she did when she pledged her troth to him at the altar.

That moment was present with her also, and grateful tears sprang to the eyes of both.

"Shall we go, dearest?" he said, giving her his arm.

But just then the great castle clock began to strike twelve, in slow, loud, solemn beats.

Sounds of rejoicing came faintly from the ball-room as the hour pealed forth that bridged from one year to another.

It was too late now to join the guests at

the mystic moment. So, clasped in one another's arms, each uttered a silent prayer that they had been brought, though by a thorny path, to this true marriage of souls.

CHAPTER XI.

THE sight of Sir Clyffe's beaming countenance, as, with his smiling wife on his arm, he entered the ball-room a few minutes after midnight, filled Lady Clare with annoyance and amazement.

How could so sudden a reconciliation have come about?

Not half an hour ago, wasn't she herself *tête-à-tête* with this man in the corridor, his dearest, most trusted friend?

Could it really be only half an hour since she had him so completely in her power as to have overruled his desire to send away Gertrude, and throw himself upon his wife's mercy! Was it actually only twenty or thirty minutes since, taking her own beautiful hand, and pressing it to his lips, her dupe had declared with intense feeling that, whatever would be the issue of his unhappy circumstances, he should, at any rate, always thank Heaven for giving him the truest, most considerate friend ever a man was blest with!

"Yes; half an hour before, her plans seemed to be succeeding. Now, with furious despair in her heart, Lady Clare saw the game was up.

She wished the oaken floor would open and swallow her, as tradition said it once did the knight whose skeleton was found in full armour under the stone hearth of the hall where Sir Clyffe and Lucy were now dancing so gaily.

To look at them made her loathe existence.

"Yes, by Jove, she is by far the handsomest woman in the room!" she overheard one elderly man remark to another. "Lady Clare Eliot, did you say? Not the widow, surely, of a scampish cad of a fellow whom we chased years ago from the 11th, for cheating at cards?"

"The same."

"Ah, well, she's a magnificent woman all the same. By Jove, I never saw a finer figure in my life! She'd look queenly behind a pair of high steppers!"

In the evolutions of the dance, Sir Clyffe had to *poussette* with Lady Clare, and, with a friendly little squeeze of her hand, took the opportunity of whispering that all was explained at last.

Lucy also seized the chance of momentary contact in the "ladies' chain" to do and say pretty much the same thing.

Both made sure of the widow's pleasure

in their reunion; for, with diabolical cunning, she had all along so carefully worded her hints as to make each put a different interpretation on them.

Her prudence now had its reward, for husband and wife were alike convinced she was, and always would be, the sincerest well-wisher they had.

And she! If she could have poisoned them with a breath, they never would have seen another day!

Oh, how she hated them, and everybody and everything—herself most of all!

The wealthy old nobleman whom she heard admiring her figure got introduced, and gave her his arm to promenade up and down the rooms.

The sudden change in the behaviour of the Dashwoods astonished Lord Marston as much as his sister; but he and Lady Clare drove home in silence.

After her maid left her, the widow sat down at the open window, and gazed into the deep darkness that precedes the dawn.

An owl was hooting eerily in an ivy-bush near the house.

"Would to Heaven it were morning!" thought the wretched woman. "How can I endure lying sleepless hour after hour?"

She sat so long, that the fire went out; and then, to keep heat in her frame, got up, and rushed, barefooted as she was, from side to side of the large, low-roofed room.

Her head seemed on fire and the rest of her frozen.

The owl was silent, but a hen began crowing.

So bad an omen would have frightened Lucy; but Lady Clare was too materialistic to be superstitious.

If there be any truth in Goethe's assertion, that *der aberglaube* (over belief) is the poetry of life, she had missed the pleasure as well as the pain of it.

Suddenly she remembered of a bottle of chloral in her bureau. It was a thing she rarely used; but the idea of an hour or two's forgetfulness came now to her as fresh air would have done to the prisoners in the black hole of Calcutta.

Again the owl hooted dismally.

She had no measure for the chloral, but taking the phial into bed, swallowed what she guessed might be almost a teaspoonful.

* * * * *

Extract from the *Yorkshire Pegasus* of Jan. 2, 187—:

"SUDDEN DEATH OF LADY CLARE ELIOT.

"A frightful and distressing event occurred yesterday morning at Dane Rock Hall, the residence of Lord Marston.

"His lordship's widowed sister, Lady Clare Eliot, who resided with him, was found dead in bed.

"She had the previous evening been present, in excellent health and spirits, at a ball given at Clyffe Castle by Sir Clyffe and Lady Dashwood.

"When her attendant left her for the night Lady Clare appeared quite as usual; but had apparently felt ill afterwards, as

a bottle of chloral was found in her hand, with the glass stopper out.

"Occasionally, though seldom, the deceased had of late used chloral for neuralgic pain, and it is probable that an attack may have come on after the cold drive home.

"Her ladyship was married in 186— to Colonel Eliot, of the Dragoon Guards, and leaves no family."

THE SPECTRE OF THE STRAND.

A TALE OF THE DAY.

BY J. GREVILLE BURNS.

PROLOGUE.

How bounteous have the heavens been this sad October day in London!

Those two essentials of life—air and water—the only gifts the poor can expect in this world, have been given to them to-day ungrudgingly—literally hurled at their unprotected heads for fifteen consecutive hours; and now, when this stirring history opens—St. Paul's has just tolled three hours before midnight—the rarest object to be met with in the streets is a beggar who isn't shining with rain, or an umbrella that hasn't been twice at least turned inside out.

In all London, on a wet and stormy night, there is probably no thoroughfare which is more depressing or uncomfortable to the pedestrian than the one which approaches Blackfriars Bridge on the City side; for there the wind and rain buffets and blusters with fiendish violence, as if with the intention of compelling him either to dive distractedly through the portals of the Underground Railway, and there rid the streets of his woe-begotten figure, or of forcing him to take "a last leap," and bury his misery in the Thames.

How the rain pours down on this spot on this particular night! At intervals it is positively pugilistic, barring even the progress of the belated *Times* reporter, and compelling him every few steps to stand still and to gaze upon the strikingly grand, though savagely uncomfortable scene which surrounds him—the massive bridge that spans the shadowy river, the struggling gas-jets, and pale electric lights sparkling star-like along road, embankment, and street—the stone, palace-like buildings that mount heavenwards into semi-darkness—the far-off blot in the sky made by the big

dome of St. Paul's Cathedral—the jolting cab, whose driver seems to have gone home and left behind his shiny hat and his stiff leathern cape to look after the horse—when suddenly he receives what a votary of the "P. R." would term "a reg'lar one in the eye" from the rain, blurring his vision, checking the progress of his thoughts, and convincing him that life to-night is not to be enjoyed, but to be wept over and deplored.

The river has been three hours and a quarter on the ebb.

It flows beneath the bridge and around the massive pillars lingeringly.

It seems a thing of life. Serpent-like, it crawls past the granite walls, licking the sides of half-stranded barges, the stairs that lead to the City, the slimy timbers of the breakwater that stands gibbet-like out of its waters, and lurking near ugly wharves like river-pirates in search of something to seize upon.

In search of corpses warm from the hands of human ghouls whose food and drink are blood and gold; in search of the bonnet, the hat, or the neckerchief of the suicide whose bones shall send earth no other message till they, too, are flung ashore, mute witnesses of mortality fifty years hence; in search of straws and feathers blown to-night from deserted birds'-nests in crumbling City church towers; of torn love-letters, scattered on the stream by despairing swains, who are only prevented by that hope which "springs eternal" from leaping in and sinking with the fragments; of broken baskets, that in the darkness look like dead men's heads half concealed; in search of these and other flotsam that shall be pounced on by human vultures in the early morn, and flung into

the mighty cauldron which boils all things down to gold!

How hideously gleams the shivering red lamp that hangs at the rear of the steam-boat-pier adjoining Blackfriars Bridge! The clanking of chains, the creaking of timbers, the asthmatical cough of the watchman as he paces the wet planks, invest the scene with an indescribable horror.

One half hour more! The tide has gone upon its mission to the sea; and its message apparently has not been one of peace, for quick flashes of lightning rend the sky, and low murmurs of thunder roll sullenly westward.

A boat can be perceived coming slowly in the direction of the bridge. Bending to the oars are four officers of the Thames Police.

Following in the wake of the small craft, fastened to the thumbcleat by a rope, is an object which closer investigation discovers to be the corpse of a female.

The face is black and bruised; the covering has been torn from the breast, and the long hair floats upwards as if appealing for justice.

The men's faces, through the pervading darkness, seem stricken with a startling and unnatural pallor.

"Well, it's five bob for you, at any rate, Bill!" said one of the policemen to his mate by his side, glancing at the body and nodding to it unconcernedly.

"And expenses for attending the inquest," replied the other.

"A good deal better than if you'd picked her up alive."

"Rayther! Though it's many a one that I 'ave snatched from a watery grave, though I don't boast about it. Still, I do consider, Joe, as the Lord Mayor, or the Common Council, or some of the Lords of the Treasury ought to give a chap some'at for bringing 'em out alive, the same as if they was dead. 'Cos why? I know a bargeman as 'as swore he'll let the next chap drown and pick 'im up arterwards."

"The monster!"

"So he are. But ain't the authorities worse than him for putting a price on dead bodies? Wot's to prevent the river-bank pirates from pitching a poor cove—or a rich one, too, for the matter of that—into the river, and finding the body arterwards. Those who lose people like this may easy find 'em; an' they gets their five bob and very few questions asked."

"Wot's the Queen adoin' to let such things go on?"

"Ha, ha! Well, she might have sent a pound or two to that brave fellow who

jumped arter a poor woman down at Woolwich the other day, and saved her life in the sight of hundreds of people. Never seed such a bit of pluck in my life. She wor right under the paddle-wheels, and it was death to approach her. Well, when my bold hero comes to look for his Sunday coat and wesket—this was last Bank Holiday—he found someone had prigg'd 'em. There was a fine state for a working man on a pleasure tour to be in! He goes to the magistrate at the nearest police-court and relates his misfortune; but as he had only saved the woman's life, and lost his best clothes, no relief could be given him. There's no reward in this country now-a-days, Joe, only for dead body finders."

"Curse the money! I'd freely give my five bob to buy that brave fellow a wesket!" cried the man in charge of the boat, drawing the body nearer and twisting the loosened rope two turns more round the thumbcleat.

"Ay, the poor give to the poor. There's many of 'em houseless in London, Joe, this blessed night!"

The boat with its speechless burden neared the narrow wooden bridge leading from the bank to the pier, and through which steamboat passengers throng during the day to boats plying between Chelsea and Woolwich.

The wind and rain still swept along the river in broad, sprayful clouds. Steamboats had ceased running since dark.

"See! What's that?" cried Bill, rising hurriedly from his seat, and pointing excitedly through the gloom over the prow of the boat.

"Where?—where?"

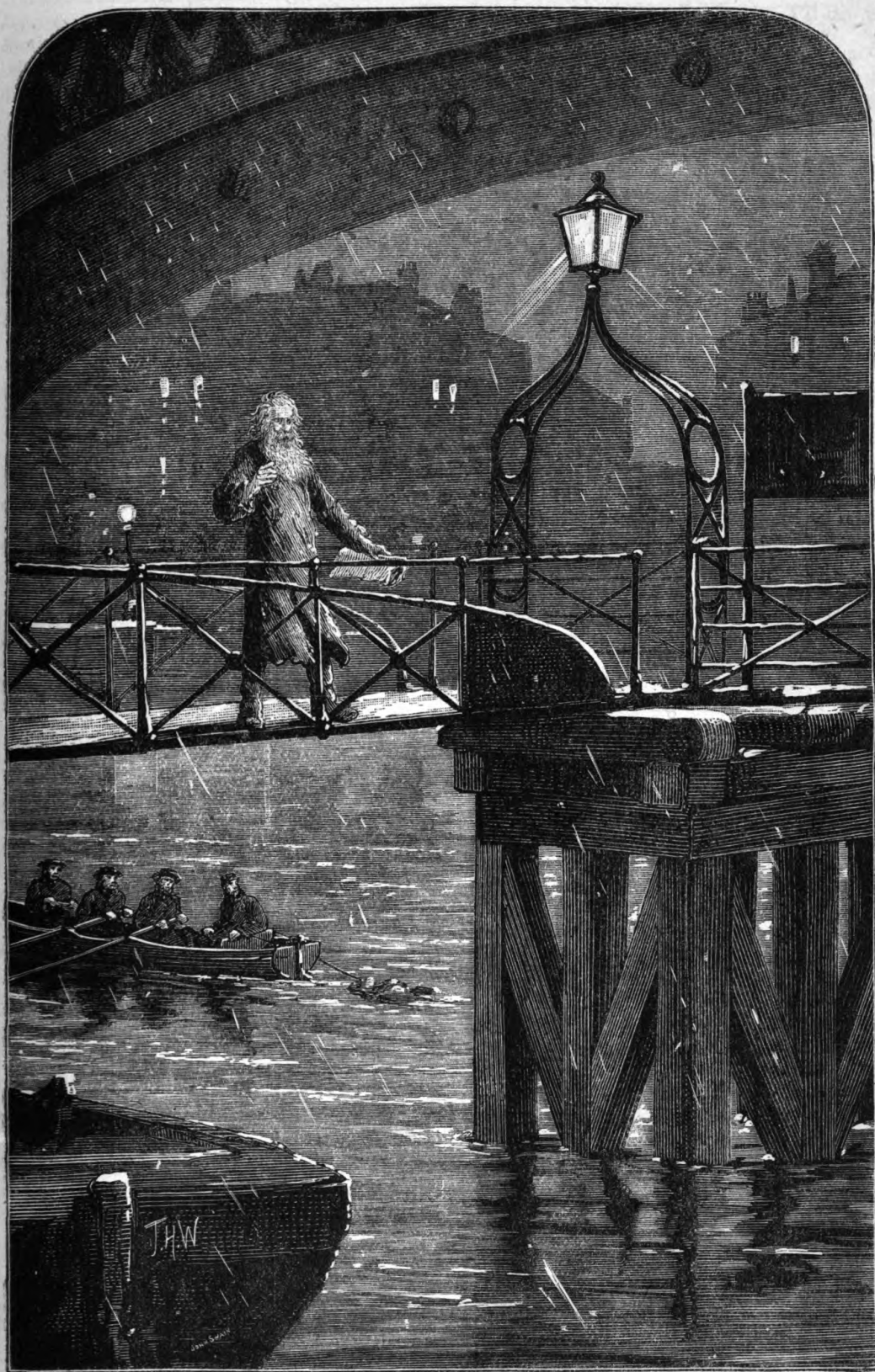
"On the bridge! That white thing! Look! It moves! Is it making for the water?"

"Quick! Turn her round! There! Look out!"

The figure of an old man with bare head and grey locks, fluttering in wet masses around his uncovered neck—his broad, massive forehead, intelligent eyes, weather-beaten face, and long, flowing, grey beard, topping a tall, slightly bent, though much attenuated frame, stands out strongly defined in the darkness. His long bony hands clutch the balustrades of the bridge as he darts a yearning glance down the river.

His left hand grips some news sheets. A contents bill for the *Echo* newspaper, saturated with rain, clings to his dripping garments. A more perfect picture of WOE in the midst of DESOLATION could hardly be imagined!

Yet the features of this strange-looking object—poor and wretchedly clad as he is



“‘THAT’S THE SPECTRE OF THE STRAND!’” (See p. 115.)

of Arras, in Normandy) there had likewise been performed a burial — Evremond's father having that morning been laid away among the ashes of his forefathers.

Guillaume Napoleon De Mouvrier had been one of France's bravest and most chivalrous soldiers under that quondam idol of French *militaires*, the great Bonaparte.

It was in Arras, his native town, whilst quelling some disorders there, that he first met the only woman he ever loved, and whom he used to call his "lovely Adèle."

There was a mystery enveloping this bright-eyed blonde which he never could solve, but, to the hour of his death, he believed in her and loved her with a doting fondness.

'Twas a strange circumstance that made them acquainted with each other. A riot had occurred in the town, and the ringleaders, with several prominent followers, had been arrested. Several of De Mouvrier's soldiers had been shot dead, many more wounded, and the guillotine or life-long labour at the Bagnes was the punishment which awaited the ringleaders in order to serve as a terrible example.

Early on the morning of the trial De Mouvrier, who was chief in command, was informed that a young lady desired the honour of an audience with him.

The officer replied testily that he could not be seen.

"Let her forward in writing the particulars of her business, and I shall attend to it in due course."

He had scarcely spoken when a tumult of voices was heard outside the door, and a girl of almost dazzling beauty, her light golden hair flying in gorgeous disorder over her shoulders, rushed into the room, evading a soldier who endeavoured to stop her, and fell upon her knees at the feet of De Mouvrier, weeping bitterly.

She wrung her hands and sobbed out, piteously, "Mercy, Monsieur le Capitaine—mercy!"

"What is the meaning of all this?" cried Colonel De Mouvrier, surveying with suspicion the sergeant and the soldiers, who respectfully stood awaiting orders. "Who's the sentry on duty?"

"I regret to say, colonel," replied the sergeant, humbly, "that Gaudet, the sentry, permitted this young woman to approach him, because she professed to be desirous of asking a question. When he turned for a moment to see that no one else was near, the girl rushed past him, and, although according to orders he called out that he would fire, she continued to run across the courtyard like a deer. He will be reprimanded, colonel; but, as he says, suddenly remem-

bering his own sister, he grounded his musket."

"Oh, please don't punish the sentry, Monsieur De Mouvrier!" the weeping girl pleaded, in moving accents. "'Twas not *his* fault; it was mine alone. He never saw me before, I am sure; and he has a good heart, and is a brave man, and if he was captain he would, I am sure, release my poor André. Will you not release him, monsieur? You must, or I shall die here at your feet!"

De Mouvrier frowned as terribly as the veriest fiend on earth ever frowned on woman, before or since.

"Leave the room!" he roared to sergeant soldiers. "Standing gaping there! I might have been assassinated long before any one of you could have prevented it! Place another sentry on duty, and send Gaudet here under arrest. Let the guard wait outside. This matter will have to be inquired into at once. Go!"

There is no doubting the fact that Colonel De Mouvrier *did* inquire into the cause of the young lady's grief most patiently and searchingly, for when Gaudet, the sentry, related his experiences of his expected reprimand, he used to tell it thus:—

"Colonel De Mouvrier, after I had stood quite fifteen minutes trembling with anxiety under arrest (for I would sooner face a blazing battery than the gallant colonel when he was angry), I say, Colonel Mouvrier opened the door himself, and in a stern voice, but with a most serene countenance, called out, 'Let Prisoner Gaudet enter.'

"Upon entering, there sat young miss smiling through a couple of tears—there wasn't more than *one* in each eye, I'll swear—and they were tears of joy.

"'Gaudet,' she began, quite pertly.

"But Colonel De Mouvrier stiffened up a little and interrupted her.

"'When next you are placed on sentry, my man, beware of permitting young ladies to approach you too closely, particularly whilst the populace is in such a state of ferment. Miss here has obtained your pardon, after a considerable amount of opposition on my part, as you may guess. Conduct the young lady to the gate.'

The next morning four citizens who had taken part in the riots were shot. Two were sentenced to ten years' service in the galleys. One only was discharged with a severe reprimand. That young man was doomed by a strange fatality to be the assassin of his benefactor and the remorseless enemy of Evremond, his only son!

Shortly after the foregoing incident, Colonel De Mouvrier and Adèle Lablanche,

daughter of a retired baker, and the pretty blonde whose charms had saved her sweet-heart from the guillotine, were joined in the bonds of matrimony.

This was the price of De Mouvrier's interposition.

Adèle's father and mother had then been dead three years, and she was living at this time under the guardianship of an elderly lady who had known the family from her birth. She had, in fact, not a single relative alive with the exception of André Marquer, the youthful ringleader in the riots at Arras, who boasted of being the foster-brother of Adèle, and who had anxiously wished to alter the relationship to that of husband.

Upon being set at liberty, through the powerful influence of Colonel De Mouvrier, he was banished the town, under pain of imprisonment; but three weeks after the marriage he was recognised by De Mouvrier standing disguised near a church door, apparently waiting for someone.

Was that someone the fair Adèle? Events will show.

De Mouvrier immediately addressed him, and, having given him a sum of money sufficient to enable him to commence an honourable career elsewhere, warned him never to return to his native town or to let him see his face again.

Adèle, to whom he confided this circumstance, blushed and turned pale in turns, stammered out thanks, and behaved, in fact, in a most confused manner. The subject of André was never afterwards referred to, though the husband could not help noting that from this day his wife behaved to him in a constrained and incomprehensible fashion.

She would frequently go to early service in the cathedral on week days, leaving De Mouvrier (who, though he had now retired from active service, had a large amount of law business to transact, and could not therefore attend with her) to remain alone until her return, which would sometimes not be until nearly noon.

Once he thought that his wife, who was shortly to present him with the first pledge of their love, had become very studious, and he attempted to learn what particular branch of study she had suddenly become so passionately attached to. He did nearly obtain a glimpse of the book; but Adèle pleaded so prettily, and pouted so lovingly, and smiled so composedly, that the easy-minded gentleman was soon persuaded to desist in his inquiries, mentally concluding that it was some trashy novel which lovely Adèle was conning.

Ab, would that it had been a good, honest

novel, Colonel De Mouvrier! But, unhappily, it was not.

The fair Adèle had commenced to study the nature and effects of POISONS; and although the colonel's grave was not actually dug at this time by the spade of the grave-digger, his last moments on earth had been accurately reckoned by his wife, and his epitaph had already been written on the gates of futurity.

One Sunday morning, about seven months after his marriage, De Mouvrier complained that he felt unwell. His was an iron constitution, and he feared at that time no physical ill that flesh is heir to; but this strange disorder, which had come upon him stealthily and insidiously, seemed now to twine about his life and to grasp him in its invisible arms like some monster intent upon strangling him.

His dear Adèle was inconsolable.

Much against her husband's will—she entertaining a lively antagonism to the disciples of Esculapius—she rang the bell and despatched a servant for a physician.

"It is nothing," said Doctor Blanche, soothingly, to Adèle. "Dyspepsia, probably—in fact, doubtlessly. M. De Mouvrier has led a very active life for many years. He requires more exercise. Tonics are necessary, and abstention from certain food and liquids."

Three days before the birth of Evremond—an event which, though in a most pitiable state of health, Colonel De Mouvrier was looking forward to with paternal fondness—he partook heartily of breakfast and went for a stroll in the park.

The balmy breeze, together with the hopeful singing of the birds and the sight of the broad tracts of unbroken meadow land stretching away in the distance, seemed to revivify the veteran, and he felt as though that strength was returning which had enabled him so often to lead his soldiers to certain victory. Buoyant with the pride of recollection, he began to carol forth a favourite song that had often cheered his comrades round the camp-fire, when suddenly his jaw dropped, and remained fixed. A dreadful pang shot through his heart—like the thrust of a bayonet. He staggered towards a bench. A young man who had been lounging upon it started to his feet.

The colonel reeled, and fell with a groan upon the gravelled earth.

His eyes opened but once.

Whose was that face that smiled down cruelly and calmly upon his death-agony?

"André Marquer!" he gasped. "Tell Adèle——"

His last words on earth were spoken.

CHAPTER II.

EIGHT years have passed since the death of Colonel De Mouvrier, during which time his "lovely Adèle" has been the wife of André Marquer.

De Mouvrier's mortal remains were scarcely laid away in their last resting-place before the worthy foster-brother insisted, with a threatening brow, that Adèle should immediately make arrangements to leave Arras (where he was still liable to be arrested) and reside with him at Paris. From the moment the law gave Marquer the right to call himself Adèle's husband his affections seemed to undergo a perfect revulsion, and instead of the warm, enthusiastic lover which she had fondly imagined she would find in him, she discovered that he was a drunkard and a gambler, too much steeped in selfishness to allow him to bestow a thought on any but *himself*—a man, in short, who would sacrifice both soul and body for the gratification of his brutal and degraded passions.

His object in marrying her, he often openly boasted, was merely to enjoy securely and independently the accumulated wealth which had been bequeathed to her by her father and by her late husband, and he frequently used to threaten that if she were not obedient to him in all things he would pauperize her, and leave her to the mercy of the cold world.

Like all bad men who find themselves suddenly in the possession of wealth and power which their evil actions have enabled them to acquire and usurp, Marquer early commenced to look around to discover who could possibly deprive him of his wealth.

His greedy eyes fell upon the defenceless child of the man whose death he had assisted to compass—that benefactor who had rescued him from the scaffold!

"Curse that young spy!" he once ejaculated to Adèle, when the delicate and sensitive child walked meekly and silently into the drawing-room. "What brings him here? Why do you not send him to the poorhouse? He doesn't belong to us!"

"Go to your own room, Evremond; I do not wish to be disturbed," said Adèle, with a quivering lip, indicative, not of any feeling of affection towards her innocent offspring, but of half-repressed revengeful passion towards her tyrannical husband.

"But, mamma, it is so lonesome, so quiet, so terrifying," pleaded little Evremond in piteous accents, accompanied by a look as full of meaning as a mature person could command.

He was, in fact, a man in mental development though only a child in years. He had

passed most of his short life in the character of a prisoner condemned to solitary confinement, hiding in all kinds of out-of-the-way places in that big, rambling house, so as to avoid the scowling eyes of his step-father and the repulsive coldness of his marble-hearted mother. He had learned somehow, four years ago, to read. Bébé, the pretty milliner, who used to come often to visit the housemaid, her sister, had given him an insight into the letters of the alphabet, and when scowls had grown blackest, and Evremond's heart palpitated most with a presentiment that the vials of wrath were soon to be poured upon his unprotected head, he had hastened with some beloved book to his own room, and cowering down breathless, had read about children who were beloved by their mothers and protected from the brutality of human monsters.

But his mind had now expanded beyond this slavish, unquestioning acquiescence. He had learned that he would some time grow up to be a man, and possibly live to deal out punishment to those who treated him ill, and a spirit had insensibly grown within his delicate frame which had at last impelled him to openly question, and even to stubbornly rebel.

"Go to your own room, you young devil!" exclaimed Marquer, striking his fist upon the drawing-room table, upsetting in his wrath a costly flower vase, which broke with a crash; "and don't leave it until you're sent for!"

The child's gaze drooped beneath the frown of his step-father, in whose eyes the glare of murder seemed to dance. He turned as if to go, but nature asserted itself, and with a low, smothered gasp he fell at his mother's feet.

"Mamma, let me stay with you—only a *little* time!" he cried. "Jeanette has gone out; and the house is *so* still, and I am *so* afraid of the ghosts!"

"Ghosts! *There!* do you hear that?" sneered André, darting a significant glance at his wife, who echoed the word tremulously.

"Ghosts!"

"Yes, mamma—pray don't beat me! The ghost always comes now when I am alone. The big, tall, dark gentleman often comes and holds out his hands to take me away with him!"

The beautiful poisoner gave a slight scream.

Was there any truth in the child's statement? Did the spirit of the dead father really hover round his poor neglected orphan? Or had the overwrought brain of the child pictured too vividly the linea-

ments of a parent he might have heard of but whom he had never seen?

Adèle quickly recovered her composure.

"Evremond, it is very naughty of you to talk of such things, and I shall send Jeanette away in the morning for putting such nonsense into your head! Now go to your room immediately!"

"Oh, please—please, mamma, I daren't go! I'm afraid; and *don't* send Jeanette away, or I shall die!"

"Do you hear, you young scoundrel? Are you going, or must I compel you to go?" cried Marquer, starting to his feet, and paling with rage.

But the child, disregarding his mother's efforts to free his hands from the skirt of her dress, clung with the incredible strength that despair gives, until André Marquer rushed forward and struck him down insensible with his clenched fist.

"My child! You've killed him!" shrieked Adèle, as with the concentrated energy of a python she stood erect and shielded her prostrate boy.

The situation was a critical one, and the scene which the three actors presented in that now silent room was awful in its dramatic realism.

The features of husband and wife remained fixed as if cut in marble. Long and searchingly they gazed at each other, as if mentally wondering whether it had now come to a "war to the knife."

Adèle's countenance was a picture of conscious guilt, of fear, and of desperation; that of Marquer was wrinkled with a sneer that mocked and dared and accused all at the same moment.

"You cruel monster!" said Adèle, with terrible slowness and distinctness. "Why did you strike the child *so hard*?"

Marquer still smiled his demoniacal leer. Yet he was visibly agitated. The fear of consequences had for a moment crept into his bosom.

"What is it to be?" he asked, with assumed calmness. "I believe I have killed him! See; the blood gushes from his nostrils!"

The mother gave a stifled sob, and lifted the inanimate body upon the damask-covered couch.

A fast-discolouring bruise near the temple marked the spot where the cruel hand had descended.

"André Marquer," she cried, in agitated accents, "have a care! I am not to be treated with impunity. You know *that*! Henceforth never lay your hand in curse or blessing upon that boy! Already he has been injured too much and too long! You comprehend me? Never!"

CHAPTER III.

SEVERAL weeks elapsed before Evremond De Mouvrier was deemed sufficiently strong to rise from a sick bed. For days and nights immediately following upon the cruel treatment to which he had been subjected he had almost incessantly shrieked in high delirium.

Now would he piteously be praying his mother to come to him; now would he talk to the "kind gentleman" who had before visited him in his solitude. Then he would cower down beneath an imaginary blow, and moan and weep with an anguish which would horrify and melt into tears the devoted Jeanette, who had nursed him when an infant, and who now alone watched over him.

That kind creature, upon her return the night the child was so ill-used, displayed a spirit of which neither Adèle nor Marquer ever dreamt her capable. She refused to leave the boy. She upbraided the mother and denounced the cruel step-father in scathing words.

Marquer threatened her with chastisement, but Jeanette, undaunted, seized the first missile that came nearest to her hand, and vowed that she would beat out his dastardly brains if he should attempt to approach her.

Marquer was therefore forced to retire to his own den, whence he issued a proclamation that as soon as the boy was ready to leave his room he should be turned from the house. He had been taught by a designing servant, he said, to disobey his kind parents, and they now washed their hands entirely from his control.

* * * * *

How the sun shone, and how the birds sang, upon the morning which saw the wretched boy led by the weeping servant down the stone steps towards the hired coach which waited at the garden-gate!

He was leaving his home, perhaps for ever!

But why did Evremond shed bitter tears and turn his head agitatedly towards a window in that house, which had been a house of torture to him ever since his birth?

Why did he walk a few steps—again look towards that muslined window—and, as the drapery moved coldly, shriek out and kiss his tiny fingers upward?

Oh, nature! Behind those curtains—the child instinctively knew—stood his mother!

Jeanette's face is disfigured with tears, and she wishes to avoid the cynical gaze of the "*cocher*." The two waifs of society now make a despairing gulp of their grief,

dash into the cab, and in a moment have disappeared in the midst of a dry cloud of Paris dust.

Away, through the cool summer breeze that played with the boy's curls and raised a tremulous blush on his cheeks; away, past familiar trees and sedate villas, and tiny winding streams, which the rain had made for the express purpose apparently of enabling little boys to sail tiny boats in; galloping over wooden bridges, that sang in boisterous chorus to the animated melody of the horse's hoofs; past angular pieces of green wayside verdure, where the fairies had imprinted little rings when dancing in the moonlight; nigh to miniature cottages, embowered with flowers and runners, and so small that surely none but fairies could inhabit them; past dark and dismal forests, that frowned suspiciously upon the travellers—away sped the horse with its burthen, until it reached far off villages, where the great metropolis was looked upon as something very important to be spoken of, but, by reason of its distance, very rarely to be visited.

"Be a good boy always, dear Evremond," whispered the faithful servant, choked with grief, as they neared the Chateau Rouge, "and Madame Massilon will be a—will be very kind to you."

She had almost said those touching words, "be a mother to you," but she reflected that the associations of that sacred word "mother" would scarcely arouse in the mind of this deeply wronged orphan the full meaning of the affection and solicitude which might perchance be showered upon him.

"Oh, Jeanette, and will you, then, leave me?" asked the terrified child, clinging to her horny hand, and kissing it frantically.

"Alas, I must!" she cried. "But be courageous, Evremond. Remember your father was a brave soldier. Ah, would that he were here! But be brave, my child!"

The boy wept.

"Look, Evremond! I have a present for you, and I will give it you only if you promise me that you will be a good boy, and try and be an honour to that dear father who is now in another world. See! I took that for you, my child! It belonged to your papa, Colonel De Mouvrier, who wore it next his heart. It is your mother's miniature. Keep it, child, for his sake. It is yours by right."

The cab now stopped before an iron gate fronting a villa built in the style of a Swiss *châlet*, and surrounded by ancient firs.

Evremond glanced tearfully through the massive bars, and perceived a little girl as tall as himself (he was now approaching

his ninth year) playing with a prettily painted india-rubber ball.

As the cab pulled up she sprang, with the lightness of a fairy, towards the gate, her straw hat, which was trimmed with blue, falling upon the lawn, and her profuse light hair flying behind her in most lovable disorder.

"Mamma!" she cried joyously.

Then, with the sudden impetuosity which characterized her first movements, she flew up the steps and hastily rang the hall bell.

Soon Madame Massilon appeared. She was a little brunette, rather stout, but animated and lively, her dark eyes wandering from Jeanette to Evremond with much vivacity and good nature.

"Ah, little Evremond—poor, delicate child! I am glad he has come; Marie will be a rare playmate for him. This way, my dear. We shall go in by the door in the rear, for there, in our favourite room, Marie has prepared a pretty feast for you."

Jeanette would not leave the carriage. Her unsophisticated heart was already breaking at the thought of parting, or with the knowledge of the effort that would inevitably be required of her to say "Good-bye."

So she contented herself with clasping the boy in her arms and kissing his forehead, and muttering through her sobs some words, which meant, "Farewell, Evremond; don't forget poor Jeanette," after which she fell back, weeping loudly, in the corner of the carriage.

Evremond recollected hearing the crack of a whip, the clang of the gates, the sound of the horse dashing back to Paris, after which his eyes seemed to grow dim, and he fainted.

Kind voices murmured sweetly in his ears ere he thoroughly returned to consciousness.

When he opened his eyes he discovered himself lying on a soft couch in a pretty little room, with red wall-paper and cool muslin curtains that waved by the side of the window, which fronted a picturesque garden. Two wistful eyes, blue and deep as the fathomless ocean, were observing him. 'Twas the little Marie, who, when he moved, warningly held up her finger to her mamma not to make a noise, though all the time she had longed so fervently that he would speak to her.

"He is very weak, poor child; we shall have to take as great care of him as we would a delicate flower," murmured Madame Massilon, administering to Evremond some cordial taken from the mysterious depths of a cupboard.

"Poor little flower!" said Marie, smooth-

ing his dark locks : " we must lead you into the sunshine, and make you grow strong."

How remarkable! Here was Miss Marie, aged eight years and seven months, whose sole care had been, ever since she had begun to exercise her mind, to lavish her affections entirely upon dolls of all sexes and infirmities, suddenly assuming quite a motherly feeling towards her fragile companion without the slightest premeditation or the knowledge that she was doing so.

Alas, poor Marie! How little did she dream that the little companion, who seemed to have come from Fairyland to throw a brighter ray of happiness upon her young life, would have cause to feel with her the anguish of many bitter sorrows to which inexorable fate had not yet given birth!

Evremond was still too delicate to enjoy the new life upon which he had just entered. All that day, with blue-eyed Marie by his side, now hushing him to sleep, now plucking a sweet flower, so that he might inhale its odour, now singing, in a soft, bird-like voice, songs of her happy infancy, he lay gazing at the tall, fantastic fir-tree that stood proudly in the centre of the garden, wondering many things, which scarce seemed to form themselves into ideas ere they vanished.

Was this to be his home for ever? Oh, that it might be!

Was Madame Massilon really going to love him, as she had said, and as she loved Marie?

Ah that she would!

Should the time ever arrive when he would be able to accompany the only child companion his life had ever known through those quiet hedge-rowed lanes, the daisied fields, the garden full of shadowy nooks, that seemed to have been made for no other purpose but to read tales of romance in?

That was all he now longed for.

His mind grew strong ere the power of his over-wrought mind and debilitated frame began to return.

Morn after morn he was tenderly carried to the little room near the garden to inhale the pure air, which, under Heaven, was the only medicine that could bring him back to vigorous life.

And day by day he slowly thrived.

A memorable afternoon was that when Madame Massilon and her little daughter for the first time walked with their invalid into the garden and slowly traversed its narrow paths. Earth and heaven seemed to rejoice in sunshine and flower and song!

The happy trio had thrice walked around the confines of the garden (which was

bounded by the high road on one side and meadows reaching out to forests on the other), and had paused for a moment to gaze at the antics of a playful kitten which had clambered up to the topmost branches of the fir-tree, when suddenly voices were heard in the road and a knock at the garden-gate.

Marie ran to undo the latch, and the door springing open revealed the figure of André Marquer.

He hastily singled out the trembling boy, and smiled at him as if contemplating the corpse of his bitterest enemy.

"Ah, madame," he cried, in his blandest tones, "I am delighted to have the pleasure of becoming acquainted with my wife's old schoolfellow!"

The two shook hands cordially, after which Marquer surveyed Evremond critically and in silence.

"Yes," he said, at length; "it is just as I thought. The poor boy wants tonics. He trembles at the sight of me—even me."

"Come and take a little refreshment, Monsieur Marquer, said Madame, leading the way to the drawing-room. "You must be fatigued with your journey."

When seated, Marquer began:—

"Madame, this dear child, who I perceive is thriving, though slowly, has now arrived at a period of life when it is necessary that his education should be looked after. Having his interest deeply at heart equally with his mother (for whom, I am sorry to say, he has not shown that natural love which one of her affectionate disposition deserves); I, to-day, made it my business to call upon a gentleman who has recently established a scholastic institution some ten miles off, my object being to place the boy under his care."

Madame sighed, whilst Marie placed her arms around Evremond's neck in dumb protest.

"He will set out with me in an hour for Doctor Marat's, where I shall make everything very comfortable for him. He will, of course, continue to make your house his home during the holidays. His poor mamma still refuses to allow her disobedient son to visit her, and we must arrange matters accordingly."

The scene at parting was a pathetic one. Evremond was tearless and silent, as if fascinated by the influence of his snake-like step-father. Marie wept copious tears, and wished to follow him, regardless of the hints as to the impropriety of a young lady desiring to become a student amongst "a pack of boys." Madame Massilon kissed him, and spoke hopefully of their next happy meeting.

Two hours later a coach drove up to M. Marat's school.

André Marquer supported his victim to the door.

There was no need to ring the bell, for the door flew open and a bald-headed, stout man, with short, straggling grey whiskers appeared at the top of the steps, panting with agitation.

He seized Marquer's hand and drew him aside, pushing the boy into the hall roughly.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he whispered hoarsely; "what evil have you brought upon my house?"

"What's the matter, you idiot? What are you dreaming about? I've brought the pupil I spoke of. Take care you give him plenty of discipline—that's all he wants!"

"Oh, misery!" cried the schoolmaster, wringing his fat hands and gnashing his teeth in his endeavours to repress his rage.

"Why did you ever follow me at all? Have you not injured me too deeply already?"

"Speak, or I'll throttle you, you old thief! What are you hinting at? What have I done to you now?"

"Since you called upon me one of my best pupils has died."

"Well; and what has that to do with me, you maniac?"

"You left in my possession some medicine."

"Yes; to be carefully administered occasionally to little Evremond who needs tonics and who will be cured by them."

"Alas! one of my scholars heard you recommend them so strongly—I forgot he was present during a portion of our interview. After you were gone, he went to the mantelpiece where I had carelessly left them and took—"

"What, you old viper?"

"He took two of those pills, M. Marquer, and in three hours he breathed his last in awful agony!"

"Where are those pills, you lying, thieving scoundrel?"

"Here! I am afraid to keep them in my possession."

"Take that poison, M. Marat, to the *Commissaire de Police*. Tell him the absurd tale you have just related to me—if you dare. I deny having any knowledge of such horrible things. Beware! I have only to wag my finger and—But, bah! go to the looking-glass and admire the prison brand on your shoulder! Ha, ha! a pretty witness, truly! There's the boy! You perfectly understand your instructions. *Au revoir*, M. Marat."

What was that which sent a cold tremour through Evremond as he felt the hand of the schoolmaster on his shoulder and heard

the door close in upon him, with a hollow, sepulchral sound?

CHAPTER IV.

WHETHER it was that M. Marat, the principal of the school in which Evremond De Mouvrier found himself a scholar, shrank from carrying out the murderous designs of the boy's step-father, for fear of another awful tragedy happening (which would certainly result in the breaking up of the institution by reason of its bad reputation amongst parents), or that the schoolmaster was in his heart, though an ex-convict, a more humane personage than André Marquer believed him to be, certain it is that during the five years the youth remained under his care he was passably well treated, whilst his education was not ill-attended to.

As each succeeding holiday arrived, Evremond sped with a blithe heart to Madame Massilon's. Her pretty Marie developed at the age of fourteen into a perfect little coquette. And when the boy and girl met, they had so much to tell to each other about what had taken place during their separation that time seemed too short to put all their pent-up thoughts into words; but what the tongue failed to tell the eyes invariably spoke—shyly but effectively, so that each, when the bright holidays were over, had much to think of, and were rarely absent from each other in thought.

But then Miss Marie was a coquette for all that—a coquette, however, with a heart. For when returning home from a party with Evremond and her mother (who regularly called for her daughter at ten o'clock on these occasions), after she had been dazzling some half imbecile youth who, perhaps, was more handsome than Evremond, she always managed to nestle herself once more into his good graces by an exceedingly contrite and attentive demeanour.

It was on these occasions that Evremond compared his features—rough and manly as a soldier's child's should be—with those of the more polished of his sex who happened to contest with him the treasure of Miss Marie Massilon's heart.

At sixteen he began to anathematize his coarse, physical appearance, and to envy the possessors of those good looks and of other glittering qualities which seemed to obtain such favour in the eyes of his sweet-heart.

Yes; he loved his fair companion with that pure, fresh passion—that passion known only to youth and innocence.

He searched the fields, the skies, and the *salons*, and he saw no object in nature or in art that could compare with his Marie. But he never told her so. That confession was only for the birds and the wild flowers to listen to in private.

In her society he was dumb; yet his heart was bursting with the gathering eloquence of his first love-tale.

"Marie, I adore you!" he burst out, one summer's evening, after he had received a hasty message from his mother to return home immediately. "Will you be my wife when, in a few years, I am a man? I will work for you, and give you all my earnings, and care for you for ever. I am nearly seventeen. In three years will you marry me?"

Was ever such an impetuous—yea, fierce—sort of love-making done before?

But it was characteristic of the soldier's blood which he had in his veins. And Marie was just the soft, impressionable material as might be expected to succumb to such influences.

So the simple "yes" was said; and the lovers walked for the last evening for some time to come, weaving more romances and building more fairy castles than could be described in books in a century.

When Evremond, in compliance with the summons he had so suddenly received, found himself once more in the house in Paris where the days of his infancy and childhood had been passed so unhappily, he learned that terrible events had happened.

André Marquer, gambler, drunkard, and murderer, had found a suicide's grave by flinging himself into the River Seine. His mother, the once beautiful Adèle, lay dying of a broken heart upon some bedding that had been left her in charity in the denuded house, whose furniture had been seized to defray long-unpaid rent.

Jeanette had married three years before; and the servant who took her place had deserted her mistress at the first intimation of "no wages."

But Evremond, almost a stranger, and penniless, in Paris, did not remain long gazing alone on the unhappy spectacle of a dying mother. Jeanette arrived almost at the same moment from a suburban district, where she resided with her little family; and having ministered to Adèle's wants to the last—the wretched creature expired the same night, speechless and unconscious—she gave the boy a refuge beneath her own humble roof.

The funeral was conducted in the most simple manner.

Jeanette and Evremond were the only

mourners. The coffin was laid in its resting-place; earth was flung upon it, and the gravedigger was filling in the clay, when a man, whose features were hidden by his hat and a handkerchief carried for that purpose, pushed aside the shovel and stood contemplating the scene for several minutes. Then, without word or gesture, he strode to the church gate and disappeared.

Evremond clutched Jeanette's hand and pointed, speechless, to the receding form.

"He is not dead, then; he still lives!" said Jeanette, fiercely.

"My step-father! What shall I do? He will kill me!" ejaculated Evremond, with affright.

"You forget my husband will protect you—ah, my brave Maurice! Let this woman-beater come into my husband's clutches and you will hear of some fine sport. He will strip him and lash him with a horsewhip!"

"What! did he ever beat my mother?" cried Evremond, with a white horror.

"Not while I was there!" cried Jeanette, hotly; "but he did after he prevailed upon her to send me, her only protectress, away; and the poor woman passed a martyrdom on earth with him."

So Evremond was now dependent on this good-natured creature for food and lodging and (most requisite of all) humane attention for many a long day, till he obtained work as a junior assistant in an oil and colour shop.

How he blushed when he thought timidly of the effect which a description of his present employment would have upon Marie! Behind the counter of a prosaic oil and colour shop, when his wild imagination had pictured such fine prospects in the immediate future!

What would Marie think?

He would become a soldier, and charm her with his gay uniform. Ah, he had carved out his path in life now! If she did not continue to love him, he would go and join the *gay militaires*.

If she should not continue to love him! Bah! Marie had given him her promise to be always his dear little, loving wife as soon as he was a man. And was he not now a man? Nearly.

He had fought the new apprentice and knocked him into a tub of lye, because he had jokingly insinuated that Marie, whose portrait was rarely out of his hands, was not pretty.

Ha! ha! he would soon be able to save some money. Then he would walk down to Madame Massillon's and display himself in a new necktie; and, after asking his dear friend's consent to marry her beautiful

daughter, they would, if she refused, elope to Paris.

So he grew into a perfect miser, and though the greatest pleasure he experienced was writing to Marie, he grudged the postage, and only wrote on special occasions. He wished to dazzle his sweetheart's eyes with his collection of silver when he next saw her.

Ha! there was nothing like appearing wealthy, whether you were so or not! So philosophised Evremond De Mouvrier as he thought of how Marie would scream with pleasure—marvel at the number of silver pieces—wonder how one young man could earn so much, and conjecture how many more he had.

Yes, it was but three days to wait. Then he would see his darling Marie!

* * * * *

"Gone! Where have they gone?"

'Tis Christmas Eve. Evremond De Mouvrier (for he it was who stood before the deserted villa once occupied by Madame Massilon and his darling) had walked ten miles through the snow and the darkness to spend his Christmas Day with his friends; and now he had just been informed by a mounted gendarme that the lady and her daughter had left the place two months before.

Left! And his Marie had deserted him without a word or a hint! Could this be true?

Desperation took possession of his soul. He sprang over the fence and strode through the virgin snow to the little parlour window.

Cold—voiceless—empty!

* * * * *

"Essex Street, Strand?" echoed a policeman, in reply to a young man, evidently a foreigner, who had inquired the whereabouts of the above thoroughfare. "First to the right, second to the left, first to the left again!"

New Year's Day! What hopeful associations do these words convey, even to the meanest beggar. Not so with Evremond De Mouvrier. Time had ceased to move; his year had ended; life would not recommence until he had spoken to Marie Massilon and learned from her own lips that she had not voluntarily fled from him!

New Year's Night! Ah, the merry parties and balls that were taking place in the great metropolis! How the grand equipages rattled along the Strand, speeding on their way with their beautiful burthen within!

Yes, this was the house. Gleaming lights and merry voices and music! How

strangely it contrasted with that snow-covered cottage not far from Paris!

"Miss Massilon is engaged; so is Madame." She certainly was not "at home" to fierce, impetuous-looking young men whose attire was not the conventional evening dress.

Was that Marie, his betrothed, laughing joyously in concert with a tall, conceited, handsome fellow, with a heavy moustache?

"Marie!"

He did not wait to be announced. He did not walk in with mincing gait, preparing neat phrases which meant nothing. No. As his mother, the unfortunate Adèle, had evaded the sentry and flung herself in a torrent of passion at the feet of Colonel De Mouvrier, the terrible disciplinarian, so he, her offspring, rushed towards the woman he loved, who he believed lived for him alone—ran with open arms and waited for her to place her head upon that breast where her memory had so long, so reverently been enshrined.

"What is the meaning of this?"

It is the voice of Madame Massilon. She pales visibly as she sees her visitor, and stands as a shield before the beautiful Marie.

The latter is white and silent—motionless as a statue.

Ah, it gave Madame much pain to beckon the young man coldly into an adjoining chamber, and inform him that Marie had, in compliance with her request, consented to marry Mr. Roupell, a rich City sharebroker, and that Marie and Evremond must never meet again.

"Only from her own lips shall I receive my doom!" the young man murmured, as he pressed his heart with his clenched fist.

And on that awful night Evremond De Mouvrier stood transfixed while Marie said the few words he compelled her to say, and which severed him from her and from happiness for ever.

* * * * *

"*Forgery by a City merchant!*" shouted the newsboys one evening near Ludgate Circus.

The evening sheets were in great demand, and the news was being discussed freely.

"Regular pull down for Roupell," remarked a "swell" with a cigar, as he offered a cigarette to his friend.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Married a beautiful Frenchwoman only a year ago. Cut an awful dash ever since. He's been up at Bow Street this morning, and committed for trial for forgery. Sorry for the girl—very pretty—knew her very well."

"Pardon me for obtruding myself upon

your conversation," said a young man—it was Evremond De Mouvrier, but, ah, how changed!—"Was the lady's name Massillon?"

"It was. Why?"

Did Evremond utter a sigh, or relax the frigidity of his icy heart as he thought of Marie's deep trouble?

No! Nor could he force himself to reflect that Marie had erred as many a weak woman had erred—had been forgiven, and had repented. No! Though starving for bread, he considered himself a Cæsar in the possession of his revenge. He was rich—rich! The false one had been humiliated and shamed before the world!

Now he began to live. He could work now with a will, before, with his punctured and aching heart, he could *not* work.

In a week he was engaged as a foreign correspondent for a mercantile firm. In three months he was independent of the world, for he had saved money, and his employers were his best friends.

* * * * *

"Show the lady in!" said Evremond De Mouvrier, whilst seated in his study one evening.

It was New Year's Eve—two years after that memorable evening when he listened to what seemed his death sentence from the lips of his unfaithful sweetheart.

It was Marie, in deep mourning. Her husband had died in prison—a convicted felon. Her child had breathed its last in a common lodging-house in Gray's Inn Road.

What a pathetic sight!

No words would have been necessary to lead to the reconciliation of the unhappy couple had the wrong inflicted not been so cruel and so bitter—had Evremond not suffered so much—so very much.

"No!" he replied.

He could not forgive. She had spoken the words that had marred his life, and, for a time, unseated his reason. She had committed what neither murderer nor bandit could perform with knife or stiletto.

The past could not be recalled!

And so she glided slowly from that room out into the melancholy twilight, the inexorable "No" which Evremond pronounced re-echoing like thunder in her ears—a sentence which only death itself could alter.

* * * * *

Unyielding man! Could his eyes have seen the ghastly forms of Want, Penury, Regret, Despair—ay, Suicide—which his

words would call forth—pitiless torturers! to dog him and her night and day in future years of undreamt-of woe—how would he have shrunk from pronouncing the words which so irrevocably parted them!

"Is there *no* hope, dear Evremond?" she had asked, her voice recalling the scenes of their childhood—"no hope that we may yet be the same to each other as then?"

Yes; in the horrible calm of that hateful room, whose walls had only lately echoed with her soft voice and footsteps, he now took a frightful pleasure in recalling her each particular look, and word, and gesture during that never-to-be-forgotten interview.

Would he never be able to banish that sorrowful face from his eyes!

"Away!—away!" he groaned, as he beat his breast, while his eyes flashed with an unnatural glare. "I must not think of it!"

Now a knock comes—a timid and unobtrusive tap outside.

'Tis she!

"Marie!" he shrieks, as he rushes to her arms.

His face is lit up with a delight truly horrible to see.

Alas! that timid tap at his door was not by the gentle, wasted, yet lovely fingers of his darling Marie; but only a favourite little child, who screams with terror as she sees his face in the half-light of that doorway, while he stands calling down curses on his soul, his life—praying that the light of his eyes may be quenched for ever, for his cruelty to that penitent creature who had pleaded for his love, yet pleaded in vain!

Out into the streets, bareheaded and coatless; out through darkness and pelting rain; out into the terrible vacuum called the world—that frightful void—that emptiness known as earth—frightful, horrible, because to him it possessed not Marie!

By the river! Down by the stairs and the wharves; through the slush and the gravel; out into the dark, deep, rushing stream. Reckless madman! he will be drowned!

She is not there!

The streets—the bridges—the Embankment—the seats—the arches—the filthy crevices into which the houseless poor creep by night for shelter.

She is not there!

How illimitably vast the great city seems to have grown!—all to allure the weeping Marie from the grasp of his burning hands.

Out, like a sigh, escaped the life from his body that awful night—leaving him soulless, cheerless, hopeless, aimless—a prematurely old, old man!

The sorrows of the hapless Marie will never be known—their sad termination alone can be recorded.

In the waters of the Thames—the pellucid water that ripples ever joyously past verdant meadows and graceful ferns, miles away from the City, and near the river's source—there the tired limbs found rest—the wounded heart was healed—the choking sob was quenched—she slept at last!

Her body it was which the Thames Police

picked up near Blackfriars Bridge the night of the awful storm.

EPILOGUE.

Evremond De Mouvrier is dead!

"The Spectre of the Strand" is no more!

In a lonesome cellar in Clare Market, Drury Lane, one sad September day, the wretched man was found lying on a straw pallet—a corpse!

His bonds had been cleft by an unseen hand!

Nature had reunited him to Marie!

S A V E D.

BY GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA.

AN! you may well say that a ladies' maid has plenty of opportunities of seeing behind the scenes of life. Plenty! There is no end to her chances. Behind the scenes! The whole theatre is open to her. She knows all the secrets of my lady's dressing-room, and can tell how much paint she puts on those beautiful blooming cheeks, and how much padding there is in her lovely silk stockings, and where all her glittering diamonds come from. Ay, and she knows all about the grand gentleman with the large whiskers and moustaches in the pit-stalls, and how much he gave for those same diamonds at Howell and James's. The ladies' maid goes into the prompter's box, and into the "flies," and down below in the "mezzanine" floor. She goes into the treasury, and knows what a hard fight the manageress has sometimes to pay the salaries of the company by three o'clock on Saturday. The ladies' maid has seen the pet of the ballet supping, not on grouse and champagne, but on pig's trotters and half-and-half. She knows all about the stage-door-keeper's little lodge, and what kind of people they are who have the beautiful bouquets from Covent Garden, and the little pink three-cornered envelopes. You may wonder at my knowing so much about play-houses and play-actors. Well, I have had my ups and my downs, or I shouldn't be here. When I couldn't get a situation with a countess, I have sometimes been obliged to serve a columbine. I have gone from a duchess to a demirep; and the last place wasn't the worst. When her serene highness had no further need of my services, I was very glad to take forty pounds a year from a tragedy queen. I was maid for two whole seasons to Madame Belladonna, at the Italian Opera House. You remember young Tom Hickathrift, the

rich pawnbroker's son, was said to have spent a hundred and seventy thousand pounds over her; and there were very ugly reports of her having poisoned Prince Grabicoff, the great Russian nobleman. She *was* a lady. How she sang! How she swore! How she smoked! How she drank champagne! She had the most charming black eyes you ever saw, and her hair used to fall in the most luxurious ringlets all over her neck; but nobody but I knew that she had a stiff knee, and one shoulder higher than the other.

Diamonds! I could tell you stories about diamonds, and pearls, and rubies, and emeralds that would make your hair stand on end. There was the Marchioness of Millefleurs. She never went to a drawing-room at St. James's, or to a ball at Devonshire House, without at least thirty thousand pounds worth of brilliants on her. And she had the diamonds too—real, genuine, flashing gems; only for six months out of every year they were safe in the custody of Mr. Triballs, the pawnbroker in the Adelphi. When she couldn't release them for a grand festivity, she used to wear paste, and that was most always; but she still enjoyed the reputation of possessing the most superb jewels of any lady in England—except, of course, Kitty Tentoes, the rope-dancer. Many and many a time have I carried the real diamonds in a black leather travelling-bag and four-wheeled cab, down to Mr. Triballs. Such a nice gentleman he was! "Slap! bang! here we are again!" he used to say, quite pleasantly. Many a time, too, have I pawned the sham diamonds with old Mr. Rabshakah Solomonson, the great Jew gentleman, in Greek Street, Soho. Bless you! he knew well enough that they were sham; for he was a diamond merchant, himself,

by trade; but he lent money on them all the same, and charged pretty handsomely for the accommodation, I promise you. He was a dear old gentleman, with a long, white beard, and always used to give me a slice of pound cake, and a glass of Madeira wine, when I called on him. Many a time, when I've sworn myself black in the face that these were the real diamonds, and not the sham ones, he'd say to me, "What a capital picture-dealer you'd make, Fanny, ma tear; you do tell *such* lies!"

But, really, I must not go gossiping on in this manner. I have had so many places and so many mistresses, and have seen so many queer scenes and things in my time, that I might continue till you all dropped off to sleep with sheer fatigue. I'll just tell you one short story of a party I lived with once, and whose name, in those days, was Lady Harriette Dash. I call her Lady Harriette Dash, because that is not her real one. She has another name now, and a grander one; but you might guess at the last were I to tell you the first one.

Well, it was full three-and-twenty years ago, and we lived in a grand house in Eaton Place. Footmen and coachmen, and grooms and valets, we had galore. We were very rich, and I had capital wages, and excellent perquisites. We went up the Rhine to Switzerland in the autumn, and to Brighton in October, and down to our place in Berkshire at Christmas, and to our other place in Devonshire at Easter; and during the London season we gave grand balls, and dinners, and parties, at our house in Eaton Place, and saw the very best of company. Stephen Dash, Esq., was a Parliament gentleman. He was member for South Maggotborough, in Cheshire. I have heard that gentlemen in Government offices are very fond of drawing their salaries; but that they don't see the fun of doing any work for their money, and that they think themselves very ill-used if they are not allowed to pass their time with their feet on the fender, reading the *Times* newspaper, and if they don't have their salaries raised once a quarter. I am sure Stephen Dash, Esq., couldn't be charged with anything of this kind. In all my born days, I never saw a mortal who worked harder. He was always at it; morning, noon, and night. He'd be up at six o'clock in the morning, fagging over papers and blue-books. Then, at eight, he'd snatch a cup of tea and a bit of dry toast for his breakfast. Then, till eleven, he'd dictate to his secretary. Then we'd see no more of him till dinner-time; but his valet, Mr. Migg, used to say that he'd go down to Parliament House, and sit

upon some things they called committees; and receive lots of people who were always wanting something, and called themselves deputations; and that then he'd go down to his club and write a bushel of letters. Then he'd run home to dinner, and half choke himself with the soup, in such a hurry was he; and then he'd go down to the House again, and make speeches till three in the morning. Often he wouldn't even come home to dinner, but would give himself indigestion with a tough mutton-chop in the Parliament dining-room. Even when he went abroad, or to our country house, Stephen Dash, Esq., wouldn't dream of taking a holiday. He'd be always fagging over those blue-books, or dictating to the secretary, or scribbling more bushels of letters, or writing pamphlets about the hop duties, or the nasty wicked criminals that get transported.

It wasn't long before Stephen Dash, Esq., was made a Government clerk himself. A Ministry went out, and another Ministry came in; and one morning, Mr. Migg, the valet—ah, dear me! Migg was a false-hearted man—says to me, "Fanny, now's the time to strike for wages; for the Tories are in, and our governor's going to be no end of a swell. He's on the high road to being Prime Minister, or Lord High Chancellor at the very least." He told me next day that master was "gazetted," which I took, at first, to be a very unfortunate thing that only happened to bankrupts; but I soon grew wiser, and learnt that my lady's husband was now the Right Honourable Stephen Dash, Privy Councillor, and Under Secretary of State for the Not-at-Home Department.

Goodness gracious save us! the poor man began to work harder than ever. He was always at the "office" now in Whitehall. He brought sack-loads of papers home to note and consider. He wore himself down to a mere thread-paper. He was obliged to wear a hare's skin under his shirt-front, and take strong beef-tea at ten o'clock every morning, so weak was he. It would have broken your heart to hear his dry, husky cough, and look at his bloodshot eyes. But everybody said that he was one of the most rising statesmen in the country—he was but thirty then, as thin as a whipping-post, and as pale as a muffin—and that he was sure some day to be made a lord, and the Lord knows what, besides.

But what did my lady think of all these grand doings? you may ask. She began to think about them in a way that boded no good to her husband, or to herself, or to anybody else, except Old Scratch, who puts such thoughts into people's heads.



"‘THIS WAY, LADIES,’ SAID A VERY CIVIL PORTER.” (See p. 134.)

First of all, I must tell you who my lady was, and what she was like. Lady Harriette Scrambledon was the youngest of the eight daughters of the Earl of Rackrent, of Debenture Castle, Post Obit County, Ireland. I don't believe she had a penny to her fortune when she was married; and I believe Lord Rackrent borrowed the money from his son-in-law—who was one of the Dashes of Devonshire, a very wealthy county family—to pay for Lady Harriette's bridal outfit, and the wedding breakfast at Farrance's Hotel. They used to say that the Earl didn't know which way to look for a five pound note; that he never paid the butcher, or the grocer, and that he was waited upon by bailiffs in livery at Debenture Castle. But he never went out in his own carriage without four horses and outriders—which it seems you are obliged to do in Ireland, or it wouldn't be thought genteel. His eldest son, Lord Gagemore, was so poor, that he was obliged to become a director to the "Extraction of Milk from Paving Stones Company," to get a livelihood; and his other son, who was in the Life Guards, could hardly afford to pay for the blacking they polished his jack boots with. Fancy being a peer of the realm, with ten children, and nothing to divide amongst them except debts and lawyers' bills! Lady Harriette was exceedingly beautiful. She was a little woman, with a skin like ivory, a cheek like a rose, and a perfect shower of golden ringlets. Her sisters, who were mostly ugly, and awfully jealous of her, used to say she was red-haired; but that was wicked scandal. She had the most dazzling teeth, the neatest figure, and the smallest hand and foot you ever saw in your life. Of course, she knew and could do everything; played on the harp and the pianoforte; spoke French, Italian, and German; drew, painted, and modelled wax flowers: and was wonderfully clever in classifying shells. I don't think she could have mended a stocking, or made an apple dumpling, to save her life; but there are certain things which ladies like her must know, and certain things which poor creatures like us must know, to get a good place.

Was she as good as she was beautiful and accomplished? Well, she was very pleasant and merry, when she wasn't out of temper, and spoke without the slightest Irish accent. She was very clever, and said all kinds of clever things. Sometimes they were rather spiteful. But was she good? My dear, she was a woman: young, pretty, vain, greedy of flattery, wholly inexperienced; and— Well, my honest belief is that she couldn't help it. Her mother had been dead many, many years—

died of a broken heart, they said; and a worldly-minded governess, and a more worldly-minded *chaperone*—which is a kind of fashionable dry-nurse for grown-up ladies—had brought her up, and brought her out. When I went to live with the Dashes, she had only been married two years and a half, and she was not yet twenty-one.

I say again that I don't believe she could help it, and that it was not entirely her fault if there was always somebody dangling about her. There was nobody to advise her, and guide her poor tottering little feet in the right path. It wasn't my plan to turn privy counsellor; indeed, I had too much care for my place itself, to volunteer advice where it wasn't asked for. She had no children then; had she had a baby, all might have gone well; for, as an adviser, and counsellor, and a peace-maker, there's nothing like a baby, although the poor little thing hasn't a tooth in his head, and can't do anything but squall. I believe that she would have loved her husband very dearly, if the Right Honourable Stephen Dash had only been able to spend a few minutes every day—say two hours a week—in order to be loved. But he hadn't the time; the poor man was always at work. We used to say in the still-room that he didn't know whether his wife had black hair or auburn; and Mrs. Cherrybran, the housekeeper, declared that he had said to her one day, "I desire that you will tell my honourable friend below the gangway"—meaning Lady Harriette—"that I should be infinitely obliged if she would send away that footman who squints and breathes hard when he opens the door." The husband was always at work, and the wife had nothing to do but to play; and the consequence, as I have said, was that somebody was always dangling about our house in Eaton Place.

If Lady Harriette had ceased to love her husband, there was one person in our house in Eaton Place whom she had *not* ceased to hate, and that most cordially. This was Count Zabidi, her husband's secretary. You may wonder at a gentleman with a title acting as clerk—for he was nothing more—to a mere commoner; but the Count was a foreigner, and very poor and friendless, and, according to Lady Harriette, the meanest and most despicable of mankind. Spy, intriguer, parasite, go-between, were the mildest terms her ladyship had to bestow on him. He went under a false name, she said, and must have done something dreadful in his own country, else he would not be ashamed of his proper designation. She had the imperti-

nence to tell her husband this one day. He laughed and replied that Zabidi had, doubtless, very good reasons for assuming an alias; and that his real name was probably so long and so unpronounceable that he had charitably spared English ears and English tongues by keeping it secret. The Count was not at all an ill-looking man; indeed, at one time, he must have been eminently handsome; but his hair was prematurely grizzled, and one side of his face was dreadfully disfigured by a deep purple scar. He never told anybody how he had got that scar. Lady Harriette used to say spitefully that he had been branded on the face by the hangman; but we servants had a notion that the Count had been wounded in fighting the battles of his country: and the servants' hall were perhaps nearer the truth than her ladyship in her boudoir. That he was an exile, and shockingly poor, was agreed on all sides. Lady Harriette declared that her husband had taken him into the house out of charity. If that were indeed the case, the Right Honourable Stephen Dash had made a very good bargain by his benevolence. Count Zabidi, they said, spoke seven languages. I know that he spoke English with the fluency of a native, though with a slight foreign accent; and from the little French I had picked up in service, I could tell that he was quite as fluent in that language as in ours. Some people said that he was a Pole; others that he was a Russian; others a Hungarian. At all events, he was the Right Honourable Stephen Dash's confidential secretary, at a salary of two hundred a year. Not his political private secretary, mind. When the Right Honourable Stephen became Under Secretary of State for the 'Not-at-Home Department,' he was obliged to engage an honourable young gentleman, a lord's son, who was one of his political friends, who had nice brown hair parted down the middle, and played beautifully on the flute. This sweet youth was called private secretary to the Right Honourable Under Secretary; but according to Mr. Migg, he never did anything at the office in Whitehall beyond mending quill pens, at which he was a good hand, and writing poems to a lady called Leonora (whose real name I suspect was Harriette—for he, too, was one of the dangles in Eaton Place), on the backs of Acts of Parliament. He was in continual trouble, too, with Mr. Dash—a very staid man, who had no vice—for smoking cigars during office hours. But the real secretary's work was done by Count Zabidi, who worked almost as hard as the Right Honourable. Hard work was not all the hardship he had to

bear. It was his lot to endure all the sneers, the scorns, the little pins of taunt and insult which Lady Harriette, with her woman's ingenuity, knew so well how to stick into him. Why she should have hated him so, at that time, I never could rightly determine. I know he admired her. Perhaps she hated him because he never told her so. But he bore all patiently, and was always quiet and respectful in her presence. Over and over again had Lady Harriette now commanded, now besought, her husband to dismiss "that odious foreign adventurer," as she called Count Zabidi. But this was a point on which the Right Honourable would never yield, and he even went so far, on more than one occasion, sternly to censure his wife for the cruelty and injustice with which she had spoken of an honourable and high-minded gentleman, whose only fault it was to be an exile, and poor. This widened the breach between them. The Count, to her ladyship's infinite distaste, lived in the house; but he took his few and simple meals apart; he never intruded himself in her splendid entertainments; and any one of us servants would have laid down our lives for him, as the saying is—so kind, so gentle, and so modest was he.

At length that which I had feared—and, indeed, fancied, for many months—came to pass. There was an odious man from India—the commander, they said, of a force of irregular cavalry in that cruel country—who for some time past had been one of the dangles in Eaton Place. I loathed the creature, though he was tall, and handsome, and sunburnt, and swaggered, and gave himself airs enough to turn the head of any woman. He was as conceited as he was tall, and deceitful as he was vain. I knew that my unhappy mistress had met this dashing villain over and over again when she had no business to have done so; that she had met him, by appointment, at parties, at the Opera, at the Zoological Gardens on Sunday, and even at pastry-cooks' and linendrapers' shops. I hoped that, as yet, no harm had come of it, and I could not hear that the world had begun to talk scandal about her ladyship; but towards the end of the London season of 184— it pleased her ladyship to make me her confidant. She called me into her dressing-room: she swore me, much against my will, to secrecy. She told me that she could bear no longer with the coldness and neglect of her husband; that she loved this conceited, false-hearted, vapouring bully; that she was ready to make any and every sacrifice for his sake; and that she was resolved that very night to abandon her hus-

band, her home, her place in society, and elope with Captain Towerlock.

The horrid man had left London, but a neat little plot had been arranged between the pair. She was to leave London by the night mail from Paddington, and join him at a place called Edgemouth—a great seaport in the west, where they were to embark on board a ship bound for India. A passage for himself and herself had been engaged under a feigned name; but they were to leave the ship—a sailing one—at Madeira, and, coming to Lisbon, travel on the Continent. I, her confidential maid, who knew all her secrets, was to accompany her. I declare that I went down on my bended knees—that I besought her, for heaven's sake—for her own, for her dead mother's—for the children's, whom she might one day bear to her lawful husband,—to give up this mad and wicked plan. But there was no moving her. Her mind was made up. She was desperate. She told me that she did not care whether I betrayed her or not; and that she would either start alone that night, or poison herself with the laudanum she always kept in her dressing-case. Most great ladies keep laudanum there; and brandy, too. What was I to do? I was but a servant—she flattered my vanity. She told me I was the only friend she had ever had in the world. Her threat to commit suicide terrified me. In her turn, she went down on her knees, and begged and prayed me not to stand between her and the man whom she loved to distraction. In a word, I promised. But very few preparations were needed for our flight. She intended only to take her jewels and a change of linen in a travelling-bag. Her outfit, she said, Towerlock had already purchased for her at Edgemouth.

As I was descending the stairs from her dressing-room, half-stupified by what I had heard and what I was about to do, I heard a door open. It was that of Count Zabidi's room. Without a word, he laid his hand on my arm, and drew me gently into his study, and locked the door. I would have screamed, but he put his hand on my mouth.

"I know all," he said, after a pause. "For once in my life, I have been an eaves-dropper. Fanny, you are not a bad woman. You did your best to save that crazy girl up-stairs. Be of good heart, she shall be Saved. Start at seven o'clock as you have arranged. The debate will be a long one to-night. *Bon voyage.*" And with this, he unlocked the door, and motioned me out; and out I went, more thunderstruck than ever.

It happened that a cousin of her lady-

ship, an old dowager, who lived in the Regent's Park, was lying at that time very ill with the rheumatism. The Right Honourable—an important debate being fixed for that evening—intended to dine at his club. Lady Harriette told the house-keeper that she would take an early dinner, and go in the evening to visit her sick cousin. She would take me with her, and it being a very rainy afternoon, she would not have any of her horses out, but would take a cab. Her will was law; and, at half-past six, I smuggled the bag with the jewels into a cab, and we started for the Great Western terminus, at Paddington. Precisely at seven, we started by the night express for Edgemouth.

There was to be no break, save to take in water, for three hours; but that break, which was just half-way in our journey to the coast, was to be a very odd and very disagreeable one. In those days, there was a great to-do about what they called the broad and narrow gauges. I have even heard of a "battle of the gauges." I think the whole matter rested on whether the space between the lines of rails on which the trains run should be so much over or so much under a certain width; but I know that the papers used to be full, three-and-twenty years since, about this gauge-squabble, and that half of the gentlemen interested seemed to have things their way, while the other half ordered matters *their* way. As far as Rowchester, which was half-way to Edgemouth, you travelled on the broad gauge; then you changed carriages, and gauge too, and went on the narrow for the remainder of your journey. A nice noise and confusion, what with the changes of luggage and passengers, there used to be at Rowchester, when you went off the broad and on to the narrow way. I know all about that, for we had been worried to death, over and over again, scampering from one train to another, when we went down to our place in Devonshire.

My lady scarcely said a word during the journey down. She was very pale, but her eyes were very red, and I think she had been crying for hours after I left her in her dressing-room. I ventured to ask her once if she was still in the same mind, and she clenched her hands and said "Yes." And then she would take out a miniature of the odious captain of irregulars, and kiss it.

We reached Rowchester precisely at ten; and there was the usual noise, and bustle, and confusion, to get the passengers and luggage from one platform to another. Children were screaming, men swearing, guards and porters shouting; in short, it

was Bedlam let loose. We were so bewildered that we did not know where to find the narrow gauge train for Edgemouth.

"This way—this way, ladies!" said a very civil porter, whose face was half-hidden by very bushy whiskers, and who found a passage for us through the throng, handed us into a carriage, banged the door, locked it, and as he went away, threw a newspaper on one of the vacant seats.

"Like to look at the last edition of the *Globe*, ladies?" he said. "Just down from town." The whistle sounded shrilly, and we were off.

"What a very civil porter!" said my lady. "Did it not strike you that he was a foreigner? I wonder they employ foreigners upon English lines. Perhaps it is to interpret."

She took up the paper, half mechanically, and began to glance at its columns. All at once, she gave a great shriek—loud, and clear, and piercing—that I could hear through all the rattle and the roar of the night express. Then she handed the paper to me; pointed to a paragraph; and burying her face in her hands, crouched in a corner of the carriage.

As well as I could, for the jerking and swinging motion of the train, I read this:—

"PAINFUL AFFAIR IN HIGH LIFE.—Rumours of a most distressing nature have reached us relative to two personages moving in the very highest circles of society. Correspondence of a most damaging character, and calculated to destroy the peace of mind of an aristocratic family, has, it is said, been discovered to have passed between a young and lovely Marchioness, the mother of a blooming family, and a well-known officer in the Bengal Irregular Cavalry. A hostile meeting has, it is said, been arranged between the gallant gay Lothario and the injured husband; but it is possible that the entire and most melancholy transaction will soon call for the ministrations of the gentlemen of the long robe."

"It is that viper, Lady Fabiansberg!" shrieked my mistress. "I always suspected her!"

Such another three hours as I passed in that night express, I hope and trust I shall never pass again. Lady Harriette wept,

and moaned, and prayed, and then executed her destiny and herself. She would kill herself, she said, so soon as she got to Edgemouth. How could she explain her absence to her husband? She was ruined, undone. And then she took out the miniature of the swaggering bully, and spat upon it, and trod it under foot.

It was just one in the morning by my watch when the train slackened speed, and drew up. "We are at Edgemouth," I said. A guard, with his lantern, drew down the carriage window, and asked us for our tickets. I gave him the tickets.

"There's some mistake here, ladies," he said. "These tickets are for Edgemouth."

"Well," I answered, "and are we not at Edgemouth? We ought to be."

"Why, Lord bless your heart alive!" cried the amazed guard; "whatever have you been and done? Edgemouth! You're three hundred miles from Edgemouth! You're at the Great Western Railway Terminus at Paddington, London! I see it all now," he continued, scratching his head. "It's the fault of that plaguey change of gauge. You've gone and made a mistake, and got into the wrong train—the up express—at Rowchester. Shall I get you a cab, ladies?"

More dead than alive, and now beginning to hope almost against hope, we moved towards a cab, the door of which was open to receive us. But somebody held the door open, and that somebody was Count Zabidi.

"You are saved!" he said to Lady Harriette, in a sad but stern voice. "I was waiting at Rowchester, and put you into a train bound for Paddington. It is but five minutes past one. The House sits late, and your husband will not be home till three. You have been to visit your sick cousin, and you are safe."

Lady Harriette made as though she would have said something.

"There is no need for thanks," he interposed, haughtily. "I could only save you by playing the spy, and you must despise me as much as ever. Good night. I have resigned my place in your household, and shall trouble you no more. In future, be a little more sparing of your scorn towards distressed exiles and foreigners."

In an instant he was gone; and Lady Harriette Dash was indeed Saved, and on her way to her husband's house in Eaton Place.

BOW BELLS ANNUAL.

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WHAT AMOUNT OF SUFFERING COULD BE AVOIDED IF WE ONLY KNEW HOW.



It is often remarked how many more people than formerly complain of feeling unwell. It is not that there is a greater amount of contagious disease afloat, for there is proof that the extent and strength of such are far less than of yore, because of better sanitary arrangements and greater attention to cleanliness and other matters. The enormous prevalence cannot be doubted of pains in the back, side, and chest, enervated and languid feelings, with loss of energy; distress and fulness of the stomach, with often a sense of deadly faintness at its pit which eating does not stay; sick headache; so-called biliousness; unpleasant breath; a sense of weariness when rising in the morning, with an unpleasant taste in the mouth; and the loss of appetite, or non-enjoyment of food. These are but the mildest effects of "feeling unwell," and yet how great is the distress and suffering, with hindrance to business and pleasure, they give rise to! The cause is not far to seek; it lies in the stomach and digestive organs, which have become impaired, to the distress of nearly all the other functions of the body. Assuredly, could the stomach always be kept in well-regulated condition through life, it would tend to far greater longevity than is now the case. The stomach is a wheel within wheels, and just as an erratic tendency on the part of a small but still important wheel of a clock leads to the disarrangement of its whole function as a time-keeper, so does the failure of so important a wheel as the digestive organs in the mechanism of the human frame throw, by their impaired vigour or inaction, all the parts depending on them—and they are legion—out of gear. Just as the wheel of the clock will require to be adjusted that accurate time may be kept, so must the impaired organs

of the stomach be restored to their original vigour. Digestion must be promoted by increasing the flow and strength of the gastric juice, and this "Seigel's Curative Syrup" will effectually do. It will impart strength to the stomach, invigorate the liver, and impart tone to the bowels, to the greater enjoyment of life and health of all who use it; and that it is so may be tested by a perusal of the testimonials in an Almanack, which will be furnished free of charge to any applicant by the proprietors, A. J. White, Limited, 21, Farringdon Road, London, E.C. The Syrup can be obtained from any chemist or medicine-vendor.

The genuine Seigel's Syrup and Pills have the words, "A. J. WHITE, Limited," engraved in the Government Stamp affixed to each bottle and box.

The following are extracts from letters received since January 1st, 1882, from well-known chemists in this country, testifying to the merits of our medicines. These gentlemen would not risk their own reputations by recommending worthless articles, nor would they make these statements unless they had knowledge of the facts.

THOMAS DALE, Upperbridge, Holmfirth:—"Your Curative Syrup sells wonderfully well, and gives every satisfaction."

W. WILKINSON, Rushden, Higham Ferrers:—"I find increased demand for large size, which shows it finds favour with the people."

J. M. CLENNELL, 25, Derby Street, Newcastle:—"I know of instances where it has not merely relieved, but actually cured after using it two or three months; but testimonials are I believe, often withheld from a false delicacy of allowing the names to be made public."

THOMAS MILLER, Wednesfield:—"Your medicines have given great satisfaction in this district, and many of my customers speak highly of Mother Seigel's Syrup."

WM. FLOWER, Beccles:—"It is not my habit to recommend any patent medicines to my customers in individual cases, but always have a good word to say for Mother Seigel when my opinion is asked."

P. S. BALLARD, Wootton Bassett:—"I have met with some really astonishing cures performed by Seigel's Syrup, and I recommend it to all of my customers."

G. H. WHITE, 39, Commercial Street, Mountain Ash:—"I can personally testify to the merits of your medicines."

JAMES FISHER EDISBURY, M.P.S., 3, High Street, Wrexham:—"I have recommended Seigel's Syrup, as my personal and relative experience of its merits are indisputable."

W. H. HEWITT, West Cowes, I.W.:—"Your medicines I have a large sale for—a sale which most certainly does not decrease now that the novelty is wearing off, which speaks well for its real merits."

SEIGEL'S OPERATING PILLS move the bowels with more ease than any others. They never gripe, nor cause any pain or distress. They act mildly, but thoroughly.

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